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THE GOSPEL OF FREEDOM


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THE

GOSPEL OF FREEDOM

BY

ROBERT HERRICK

AUTHOR OF "THE MAN WHO WINS," "LITERARY LOVE-LETTERS AND OTHER STORIES"

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To

The Memory of

P. S. A.

"Somewhere, surely, afar,
In the sounding labour-house vast
Of being, is practised that strength,
Zealous, beneficent, firm!"

THE GOSPEL OF FREEDOM

PART I

CHAPTER I

SIMEON ERARD tiptoed deftly across the room, tugging at his thin, sandy beard. Fumbling among the curtains which draped one corner of the best light, he pulled the cord, after carefully eyeing his visitors to see that all were placed properly. The light silk folds fell apart, revealing a small canvas,—a cool deep slit of grey water let into a marble floor, which was cut in two by the languorous reach of a woman's back done in hard green. The large masses of auburn hair of the bent head floated on the creamy slab. The artist coughed.

"Well!" exclaimed Mrs. Anthon, in a puff of surprise. "A bath-room, I declare!"

"Is that your exhibition-picture?" inquired her brother-in-law, Sebastian Anthon, a little dubiously. Erard took no notice of these wavering remarks. To him they were the necessary comment of the world, to which he habitually paid as marked disrespect as he dared.

"You see, don't you, Miss Anthon," his voice was persuasively patronizing, "what I have tried to do? You grasp the difficulties, don't you? Of course to the

crowd it's nothing but a modern bath, half full of water, with a young woman in it, whose hair is red. But you see the vigor of that leg, the coolness of that water shot with light. You *feel* it. The artist — and the rare person — will stop before that picture; *he* will know what it means. And the artist paints for the artist; shouldn't he, Miss Anthon?"

The young woman thus distinguished by the special appeal waived the responsibility of assent to the last proposition. But she moved away from the little group of suspicious critics, drawing near to the picture, as if she were willing to represent the sympathetic intelligence.

"Yes," she murmured slyly, "that leg half in the water, half out, is subtle. The flesh gives itself to the coolness."

Mrs. Anthon began ostentatiously to use her lorgnette on the room. Sebastian Anthon turned one or two canvases to the light.

"Ah!" the young artist responded, "my dear Miss Anthon, you are the right sort; you understand. Don't you *feel* that back rippling into the new medium? To do the little bit where the lights change," he indicated hastily a patch of rough brushwork, "that was the keenest delight of the past year, the best minutes of intense existence, and for that we artists live, don't we?"

The girl half smiled as if something vaguely humorous crossed her mind, yet again her impulse was to take his part against his antipathetic fellow-countrymen.

"Well, that cornfield didn't grow in the States, I'd bet!" This ejaculation came from a young man, who had

unearthed a sketch in bright yellows. He stood with his cane behind his back, his light coat thrown open, in an attitude of eager expectation, and anxiety to lose nothing that was going on, while hunting for appropriate expression. The dull Paris sunlight of a November afternoon sobered the robust hue of his face and his broad hands. "Eh!" Erard remarked indifferently, "that's a sketch I made in Calabria, an effort in yellows." He turned the canvas back to the wall, as if he would take from a child a fragile toy.

"This impressionistic business is beyond me," the young man remarked defiantly, addressing Mrs. Anthon for support.

"Adela hasn't done much in it yet," Mrs. Anthon answered. "You know, Mr. Wilbur, she's at Jerome's. He's good for the drawing, they say, and then he has so many studios, and one is up our way, just behind the Madeleine. And Jerome has such a good class of young women. I couldn't have Adela running about and living as the common art-students do. No Trilby stuff for me, I said to Sebastian, when he advised me to take Adela over here and let her have a chance to culture herself. Adela rather wanted to try it by herself for a year, but her father made her keep on at Bryn Mawr, that school down near Baltimore, where they wear caps and gowns. But when her father died,—her elder brother was married and living out to Denver, and Walter was just finishing school at Harvard,—I said I couldn't be left alone. What are children good for, if they're going to run away to college and to art-schools?

group by a young American sculptor, completed the obvious contents.

The ladies exclaimed. Wilbur observed thoughtfully, "I should think you would rattle around a little."

"Ah! I don't live here," Erard answered airily, pushing open the large folding doors beside the fireplace. "*This* is my den, and beyond are the bedrooms."

The inner room was of the same dignified height as the rest of the apartment. A bit of tapestry on one side, and shelves for books and photographs on another, hid the walls. In one corner was a simple ormolu table, where notes lay half-opened, and beside it a lounge. A few high-backed chairs, each one a precious find, were ranged like solemn lackeys along the walls. A second piece of tapestry cut off a dimly lighted alcove, where a bed of state could be seen,—"also of the period," as Erard remarked complacently. The visitors were still admiring when the servant opened the door into the dining salon.

"We will have some punch," Erard sighed, throwing himself into the deep chair at the head of the table, in which his small figure seemed engulfed. While Pierre, like an attentive mouse, passed the punch and cakes, the Americans let their eyes roam over the room. It was sombre with heavy furniture, but scrupulously confined to "the period," from the few plates that looked down from the lofty sideboard, to the andirons on the hearth.

"An ideal nest," Miss Anthon murmured.

"Your man makes such good punch," Mrs. Anthon added.


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Jersey City, whence he had emerged upon the circle of patrons and patronesses who were to attend him on towards fame. With a subtle insight into his own resources, he knew that women would always be useful to him; that they were most excellent working-partners of fame. To have a chorus of women at your command was like subsidizing the press: it was a dangerous weapon to use, but its range was incalculable. And in manipulating women he was skilful enough to exclude the sexual basis. He never appeared to them in the light of a possible husband or lover. Further, he never included a stupid woman in his chorus merely because she made court to him.

Just now it seemed to him better worth while securing a new ally than opening the dangerous question started by the old man. So he led the party back to the salon and begged Miss Anthon to try the spinet. While he explained the working of the instrument, he threw out casually some remarks about music. The young woman struck a few thin chords, that rustled like yellowed parchment in the lofty room; her glance followed the artist as he looked after his guests.

Now he was talking to Wilbur, who was eagerly loquacious. She could catch phrases: ". . . run over for a few months . . . business dull . . . had a chance to be fixed up in a little job . . . pretty good place . . . am a University of Michigan man." Erard's little eyes were coolly judging the expansive young man, assigning him to his species, and calculating the exact amount of significance he might contain.

Who was this Erard? She had heard her mother refer often enough to Sebastian Anthon's "folly" over that "painter-fellow" he had picked up in New York as a tutor for his daughter. She remembered many little details of his career: how her uncle had found him in a print-shop behind the counter, and had encouraged him in his efforts to worm his way through the art-school. Later he had come to Sebastian Anthon's summer home, on the half-intimate footing of a tutor, and she remembered to have seen him there, — a sullen, ugly lad, with his material and stupid charge. Then Erard had gone abroad, first with Uncle Sebastian, then again for a long period by himself. And her mother accused him of "getting Sebastian to waste good money on pictures and such stuff."

She was not aware that Erard had done much to justify all the Anthon money that had gone into his career. At least if you counted by tangible evidences! She did not know that one of the first precepts which the protégé had inculcated had been that you should *not* count by vulgar or tangible proofs, such as books published, pictures painted and sold, articles appearing in magazines, with accompanying checks and drafts.

For Erard's initial ambition — to paint — had expanded in the atmosphere of Paris, until now it would be hard to say just where he proposed to apply his force. A professorship in æsthetics, the editorship of a magazine devoted to the arts, the curatorship of a museum, — one or all, might have satisfied his present ambition. Yet he had never quite abandoned actual creative work. Now

and then, whenever Sebastian Anthon was becoming unusually restless, some one "evidence" appeared to justify the interest that old Anthon was taking in him. Some clever article on the Salons for an American journal, a little essay on an early Italian master in an English magazine, a portrait of Mrs. George Payne,— the editor's young wife,— which set the American colony in Paris agog with talk; at the worst, some bit of encouraging gossip from "a man who knew." Perhaps Erard had been right in not forcing himself; Sebastian Anthon shivered at the thought of how he himself had been forced.

It had been superb in its way, Erard's campaign thus far, or preparation for campaign. Once in Paris, the very pavement seemed familiar to him, the air in the streets to be intimate. "You are one of us," it whispered. He prepared leisurely to realize far-reaching projects. He was never idle, and he was rarely dissipated. Quite early, it is probable, he suspected that his organism was not the artist's; his blood was too thin. But his power was to comprehend, to enjoy and relate. Or, to use the phrase that he found for his patron, "to know the background." So he had had the audacity to proceed from capital to capital, establishing large siege-lines,— the audacity, when to-morrow might find him at the pawn-shop with nothing to pawn. Perhaps he knew his world better than most; had he had more scrupulous doubts, he would have failed at the outset.

To-day he had asked the Anthons to see his apartment and his new picture ; for he still painted, cleverly aware that the world, after all, pays a certain homage

to the mystery of creation that it denies to mere knowledge. His guests, however, seemed to be impressed more with the apartment in which he had enveloped himself, by the very vulgar facts of physical appointments, than by his excellent picture. The afternoon had engendered a moral opposition which he must overcome in some way. Sebastian Anthon was especially necessary to him just now; he must spend this winter in Spain. And he would like to have this nice old man fall in with the plan, even if it necessitated including his niece, and, at the worst, the voluble lady her mother.

That person could be heard, above the notes of the spinet, in her monologue to the patient Wilbur. "I shall take Adela to Aix-les-Bains as soon as the season opens. I tell her that what she wants is to know people, to meet pleasant friends, not to spend her year over here fooling about in a studio. I guess she hasn't any great talent. Walter has set his heart on making a writer of himself, and I guess one genius in the family is enough." The purple bows on Mrs. Anthon's new Parisian hat tossed in time with the vehement workings of her short, thick body. She had settled into an aggressive pace.

Erard paused for a moment by her side, and then, as the music faded out, stepped back to Miss Anthon. Her face, which was turned towards the light, wore a look of tolerance, and the restless tapping of one foot upon the marquetry betrayed a stifled criticism of her mother's chatter.

The young artist noted that the moulding of the face

had been begun freely and graciously. Nothing was final. It might be interesting to know where the next few years would place the emphasis. Meantime the impulse of life was throbbing in that face actively, generously. To feel, to understand, and — what is more — to act swiftly, — a promise of such powers it held forth.

"You are working here?" Erard observed. Miss Anthon turned to him with relief.

"Oh! fooling, as the rest do. It seems so utterly silly, but it is better than shopping perpetually, or running about to see things you don't understand."

"Did you do much — earlier?" Erard assumed easily the catechist's place.

"Never — much — of anything," she confessed slowly. "But I liked it awfully, only papa wanted me to have a sound education first."

"Quite wise — that papa."

"Why?"

"Because the chances are that you may know something some day, but there isn't much chance of your ever doing anything."

Miss Anthon flushed at this cool estimation of her range by her uncle's protégé. Yet her good sense and her curiosity kept her from betraying any foolish annoyance, and the two were soon far on in an intimate conversation. Erard's finality in judgments, and his conjuror's trick of knowing all about herself without detailed confession, impressed Miss Anthon.

At last the visitors gathered themselves up, and Mrs. Anthon said a distant good-by to their host. Miss

Anthon added to her mother's conventionally expressed hope that they might see Erard again, a pointed invitation. "Come and show me what I ought to know."

"Would you care to see Degas's new picture?"

The girl answered with a look, with a flutter of astonishment. Who was this young man who could take her to Degas's studio? As they moved into the hall, Erard found an opportunity to hand her the last *Revue Internationale.* "Perhaps you will care to look this over; it's an article on Degas I wrote last spring."

Then Pierre, the solemn man-servant, appeared with an old horn lantern, pulled back the long iron bolt, and prepared to escort the guests to the courtyard. In the hall a slender crane, supporting a flickering candle, reached out above the stairs. Erard stood under its shrine-like glimmer, wafting courtly cordialities to the descending guests. As Miss Anthon passed the bend in the stairs Pierre's lantern threw a dash of light upon her dark strong form, while the plumes in her hat made magnificent shadows upon the stone walls. She swung her loose cape about her, as a young officer years before might have wrapped himself in his military cloak before venturing into the night-blast below. She looked up at him and smiled with the frank recognition one gives to a possible master. The last sound Erard heard, as the great doors creaked open below, was Mrs. Anthon's shrill babble about dinner.

CHAPTER II

LEAVING Wilbur and Mrs. Anthon to find a cab, Miss Anthon and her uncle proceeded across the Quarter by silent side streets, the old man turning instinctively here and there, until suddenly they came out on the Luxembourg gardens.

"I used to live up there," Mr. Anthon remarked, pointing towards a deserted alley, "in number 75. That was before your father was married, when the family were living in New York. Father gave each of us five thousand dollars when we came of age. John went to St. Louis and began the brick business. I came over here —"

"Why did you give this up?" his niece asked eagerly, with a renewed appreciation of the artist's delights.

Sebastian Anthon turned his blue eyes to her wonderingly. "John thought it best. Art wasn't much of a career then, and your father rather managed all of us. We had good times in *soixante-quinze*," he added musingly, standing still to peer up at the maze of broken roofs.

The girl followed his gaze sympathetically. She could suspect a little more of the story than the old man's words told. She had felt the iron will that until two years ago, when death stepped in, had governed the

Anthons. The elder brother's practical power, his intolerance, his indomitable activity, had bent them all. His little brick business had expanded, until all the Anthons, root and branch, were brick-makers, and each member of the family had his block of brick-stock. The boys, as they came along, were drafted into the business at twenty, and the women were pensioned off. John Anthon had governed the state in St. Louis; Sebastian had been his protesting but faithful satrap in New York.

When John died, leaving bricks at 200, with regular 12 per cent dividends, the business so ably managed that it might run on until man had no further need for bricks, or clay was exhausted, Sebastian Anthon slyly withdrew from his post and looked about for amusement for his declining years. He remembered wistfully how he had once thought of a garret room in Paris, of long days in Barbazon; he could not paint now, and so he had taken to buying pictures.

"And that was why you helped Mr. Erard," his niece insinuated thoughtfully.

The old man nodded, and added half apologetically, "He can have the life, the hope,— even if he doesn't do much." Perhaps Erard had grown to look upon him as a skilful financial agent, who provided both capital and interest. This attitude might be immoral, but the patron received his compensation.

"But he has done something; he will do something," the young woman replied buoyantly.

"It's a growth that becomes sterile easily — terribly

easily," her uncle mused. "Perhaps one can't assist nature, yet to have the chance, that is the great thing." He looked once more wistfully over the roofs, and then turned into the gardens. He stopped again as they came out behind the palace, with its gracious façade just visible in the twilight and fog. "I used to come out here to walk. There was more going on then everywhere — students and politics. You never knew what might happen."

When they reached Foyot's they found Wilbur and Mrs. Anthon already at their oysters. Seated at table with them was a blond young man, Mrs. Anthon's youngest son, who was examining carefully the wine-card. As his sister came in, he glanced up with the remark, —

"Well, what did you think of Uncle Seb's little Jew? Wilbur and mamma have been slanging him ever since they came in."

Mrs. Anthon broke out at once. "Your young friend seems to have made himself comfortable, Sebastian. I suppose painting bath-tubs must pay pretty well. I must say, and I am no prude, as you know, Sebastian, that I can't understand all this loose art. What good is it for an American to come over here and learn to paint naked women in a bath-tub, so that you can see the water swashing about? They can't sell such things in America. It's well enough for once in a while to see 'em over here, but we don't want that kind of picture to hang up in our homes. I used to say to John, buy good pleasing copies, something that's elevating, or nice country scenes, but

don't bring any of that modern French trash into *my* parlours."

The soup arriving just then, Wilbur had his chance.

"That's so, Mrs. Anthon. But I suppose they are after something. Erard seems a clever fellow; he believes in himself hard enough, and that's the way to get there. I must say, though, that I have never found a young fellow who got much permanent improvement out of this foreign business. That wasn't the way with our fathers, or with our high-class literary men to-day. They made their way first and came over here later on to polish off. Isn't that about so, Mr. Anthon?"

Sebastian Anthon made no reply. He was watching two young fellows seated on the leather couch near the window. They were gesticulating and pounding the table, emitting dynamic words,—*la loi, morale, vrais enthusiasmes.*

"Mr. Erard is quite the most interesting man I have ever met," Miss Anthon pronounced dogmatically, irritated by the bearish atmosphere. "I can't quite see why we Americans, who are always whooping for success, and pardon everything if it only leads to our ends, should have so many doubts about that same selfishness when used for other things than getting dollars or going into politics. We are dreadfully moral as soon as it comes to art or to anything that doesn't give a bank account. If I were a man without a cent, I would do precisely what Mr. Erard has done — make the world support me."

"Live on charity?" Wilbur exclaimed sharply.

"The eternal discussion," Walter Anthon put in, as if bored. Hitherto he had confined himself to ordering and testing his dinner.

"Yes, why not?" Miss Anthon continued pugnaciously. "If I gave them something back in return, some new sensations or ideas. Don't you agree with me, Uncle Seb?"

Sebastian Anthon had been sipping his wine meditatively, ignoring alike the food and the talk. "I was thinking," he said tranquilly, "that just thirty-eight years ago last June, I took my last dinner in Paris over there where those fellows are sitting. It's changed since then, — I mean the world." This reflection appeased the argumentative temper, and talk died out.

"I am going to hear Yvette Guilbert," at last announced young Anthon, with something of a swagger. "Will you go, Wilbur?"

Wilbur responded by a conscious smile and then glanced at the others. "What would the ladies say?"

"Walter wouldn't think it nice if we were to go," Miss Anthon answered. "I will go some other time, — when we are all developed."

Walter looked at his sister suspiciously. "They are doing that kind of thing in London, but it's safer not. I shouldn't care to meet my friends —"

Miss Anthon waved her hand deprecatingly. She had heard a good deal about her brother's friends. He had started "a literary career" in London, very favorably, with a thin volume of verse, some good letters of introduction, and a pleasant manner.

"Well, you won't come, Wilbur? I shall be busy to-morrow, mother. Will see you some time this week. Good-night."

Walter Anthon selected his coat and stalked off. Mrs. Anthon looked after him wistfully, as if half inclined to follow her boy. Instead the party drifted into a cab and were put down by the boulevards. Their evenings usually concluded like this at a café, or, more rarely, at the opera.

The boulevard resounded, like an animated river, coursing on swiftly, temptingly. The crowd, even on this dull November evening, was hurrying past, keenly alive about something, — but Miss Anthon was obliged to sit at the little table beside the throng, an ignorant outsider. The scene was perpetually alluring her to experiment in new fields, yet she could never tread the pavement, mistress of herself. This life of idly running hither and thither was merely irritating. The longing to escape from her mother, who lived in another kind of world, even from her uncle and Wilbur, who were not quite in place in Paris, increased until her nerves were sore.

She had never felt this rebellion in St. Louis. Out of the general blur of her past life one important figure loomed everywhere, dominated everything, — her father, John Anthon. That angular, hard-headed man had in many ways substituted his daughter for his wife. She could comprehend, now that her mother was cut off from the usual outlets of neighbourly gossip, how wearisome Mrs. Anthon must have become to the silent persistent man, who had engineered all their fortunes to such comfortable ends. She realized that she had gone to this

father for understanding. He was her confidant in her experiences in the little social pool of St. Louis. He had taught her to read intelligently, had provided her with tutors; to escape the nonsense of girls' schools, he had sent her to Bryn Mawr "in the hope that when middle-life came she would have a few more resources than her mother." His standards of vitriolic common sense had influenced her girlish choice of friends, had carried her safely through the silly years.

He was honest, she knew, he was direct; he believed in the gospel of work; he endured much in the family; he never had an idea devoid of effort. His life had been one prolonged battle that wrung him to the last reserve of strength. There had been little joy in it but the joy of success.

It was gaunt, that ideal!

Yet all this she had accepted as a type of what a man should be, of how he should treat himself. Moreover, she reasoned that a woman should not be spared the full rigours of the game. Of course the actualities of daily living were disagreeable, but any one who sought to shirk those necessities, who sought to take his existence out of the mill where fate had fixed him, was a mere trifler.

Was she quite sure of that truth, after this day?

When that father died, the demand for sacrifice had come through her mother, and she had not questioned it. What she had gone to Bryn Mawr for was not personal gratification — at least, she thought not — but equipment. She must respond to events, as her father

had done many years ago when he took the Anthon affairs in hand, without disguising the unpleasant consequences to herself.

It was a primitive religion blindly taught and blindly followed.

Just what could she do for her mother, now that she had made this sacrifice of her independence? Her brothers had expected it; in the general emotional drawing together of the family after Mr. Anthon's death, it had not seemed so impossible. Had her father, however, expected it? He had left her an independent fortune. There might be an implication in that fact.

St. Louis, without that father and without any definite goal except to make herself companionable to her mother, had soon become intolerable. The college youths, home for vacation, appeared more childish than ever; the staid young men in business, more wooden. In desperation, one day, she found herself on the point of accepting a young lawyer, for the sole reason, when she paused to reflect, that he agreed with her in finding St. Louis arid. The fathers and mothers of the present turbulent generation had toiled out their days, and at night had been content to sit dully on the great stone stoops, or in the stuffy parlours, merely idle, until the morrow of renewed effort. The children had their energy, and yet refused the old task. So, naturally enough, she had entered into Sebastian Anthon's plan of a year in Europe, — a convenient solution for every American family in doubt or distress.

The file of carriages had thinned out; the theatres

had opened. Waiters were standing listlessly in the doors of the cafés. Mrs. Anthon was saying, —

"Don't be a fool, Sebastian, over that fellow. He is a worthless young man. I told you five years ago, 'Sebastian, you are perverting that young man. Give him a place in the brick company, and let him earn his salt, as you have done, as John did.' But you were weak and amiable, and the Erard kind get around you."

Miss Anthon smiled at the idea of Erard in bricks. Moreover, wasn't all this talk about Mr. Simeon Erard's manner of livelihood rather vulgar and impertinent? Here in Paris it was easy to slip away from her harsh creed of common prejudices. Erard seemed to her the most interesting figure on her horizon, and she was tempted to accept him for what he could give her, for what he had given her already.

She rose hastily, stifled, eager to step out on the boulevard, to follow the throng. "I will walk back to the hotel, mamma, if Mr. Wilbur will go with me."

The young man got up with an air of relief, and the two started down the boulevard in the direction of the Avenue de l'Opera. He offered her his arm awkwardly, noticing that the other men and women were promenading linked together. Miss Anthon laughed: "We're Americans and needn't do it!"

She strode out, every muscle responding joyously, after the inert hours. Her eyes turned here and there, inspecting the faces in the cafés, the crowded omnibuses, the idle throng. One need not reflect here: the river of life coursed swiftly, merrily.

CHAPTER III

As the two neared the opera-house, Miss Anthon walked more leisurely and paid some attention to her companion. The night was soft for November; she had no wish to immure herself in the close hotel.

"Paris takes me out of my skin," she said half apologetically. "The whole thing absorbs me; every one seems to be living so eagerly."

"Puttering about, I should say. They are like a lot of children!" her companion replied unenthusiastically. He had been born on a farm in upper Michigan — he called it Michigāān — and had ridden his pony to school six miles each day, after doing "father's chores." A month of Paris had not rubbed off his peasant suspiciousness. As if in defence of his truculent attitude, he added, "You hit me pretty hard, Miss Anthon, — what you said about Americans appreciating only the success of dollars and politics."

"Why?" The girl focussed her attention wonderingly on her companion.

"That's what I am after, always have been, since I began teaching elocution and literature up in the old Michigan school. I taught there two years," he continued simply, with the homely, unconscious conceit of

a man interested in his own drama, yet who can relish the picturesqueness of it. "Then I saw my way to some college learning, and in one way or another I kept at the state university for four years. One summer I peddled dry goods in Iowy and Nebrasky. Another I sold ploughs in Texas."

His companion sauntered slowly, keeping a sympathetic silence. There was a pleasant kind of brag in his simple epic.

"But I got my chance one red-hot August day, when I met Joe Dinsmore in the smoking-car of a C. B. & Q. train, crossing a Kansas prairie. Big Joe was on his way to look over a piece of land that had come back on a client of his on a mortgage. He took to me, and we rode over to see the sand-heap his man had lent twenty thousand on. The mortgage called it 'fertile farming land.' Dinsmore swore and then laughed when he'd seen the miles of drouth and blasted grass and corn. But I got out of the buggy and scraped a hole in the hot ground. Then I took a look at the air; my! it just waltzed and sang over our heads, fit to blister the paint on the team. Well, we drove on, Dinsmore mad, and me quiet, until we came to the Waralla River. Then I smiled."

His face relaxed at the memory, and he pushed his tall silk hat back to a rakish angle, unconscious of the city, of the whirling carriages, of everything save that vital moment of triumph out on the arid prairie.

"Dinsmore was mopping his head and growling: 'Rantoul was a blankish eastern idiot; he might as well

throw up the sponge. Two square miles of this ash-heap!'

"But," in the fervour of his tale, Wilbur turned squarely to the girl, "I smiled at him. 'Dinsmore,' I said, 'you know how to draw a brief and run a caucus and bluff a jury,— and perhaps a few other things,— but you don't understand this game.' 'Well,' he growled, 'what have you got to offer?' 'Irrigation,' I said; and he howled. 'Irrigate, you damn fool, when the banks of that cussed river are twenty-five feet high on either side, and no coal within two hundred miles!'

"Then I explained myself. I told him how I and a classmate at Michigan one spring invented just the machine for this. 'It's working to-day on father's farm up in northern Michigan.' 'How long will it take us to git there?' he jerked out. 'Three days.' Well, the old wheel we had rigged up, Jim Center and me, was there pumping away like the day we left it, when Dinsmore and I drove over from the station."

Here Wilbur, in his excitement, had stopped at a deserted *brasserie*, and taking two chairs from the nearest table, he described minutely the water-hoister with all its superb points. Miss Anthon sank into a chair. They were near the hotel now, and the tale absorbed her.

"Dinsmore looked it over; he said nothing; then he started it running; then he looked it over again. 'My boy,' he said, as we walked up to the house, 'there is a desk for you in my office in Chicago. You read law. Some day you will be managing a "Water-Hoister Company."' That was near three years ago."

Wilbur ordered a *bock*. After one sip he put the glass down and went on. There were delightful appendices to this epic. Dinsmore had tried to cheat him, but—

"I held him up in his own office, on the tenth floor of the Sears building. 'A square deal,' I said, 'or you don't get out of this office.' And Dinsmore has done the right thing ever since."

Miss Anthon's blood ran in little throbs as he described this primitive arrangement in the tenth floor of an office-building, where the old eel of a politician had been foiled by his sharp clerk.

"Then Dinsmore tried to do Rantoul on his land, when he saw what a fat thing we had. But," here the young fellow smiled in appreciation of his astuteness rather than of his honesty, "Rantoul has his third now."

Later Wilbur had gone to Washington as secretary for an Illinois boss, and while there had arranged the patents and started the Water-Hoister Improvement Company. Center was remembered.

"I gave him a quarter of my third. He is teaching school up Minnesota way. Some day he will be a rich man and won't know what has struck him."

"How can you be spared?" Miss Anthon asked, as the story seemed to end in the air. "How did you dare to run over here for three months and be so far away from your schemes?"

Wilbur laughed and was silent for a moment, with that look of seeing around a corner which comes into the faces of shrewd, new men.

"Well, Miss Anthon," he gazed at her frankly, as if she would compel his inmost secrets, "I'm not quite fit for what's ahead, not even with what I got over there at the old school. I mean to get into bigger things than this water-hoister affair. So it won't hurt me to have a look around; it's about the last time I shall have a chance. And I worked hard at the job, got Rantoul's affairs all cleared up, his creditors satisfied. There's nothing to do now, but wait for the factory to turn out the machines. I shall be starting back soon when the time comes to boom. And," he added jocularly, "Paris is good enough for me when I'm not in shirt-sleeves."

Miss Anthon's face glowed with her excitement over the story. It touched her imagination: money-getting, it seemed, might be another affair than taciturn, reserved old John Anthon had made it. Wilbur brought out the romance. And she pardoned the hero's genial complacency in his own cleverness, his colossal confidence that the world and he had been made just so that he might bring about his combinations. His tolerance of the old-world, in spite of his suspicion, was also fine. She got up, regretfully, aware for the first time that it was not quite the place for her,—the Boulevard des Capucines at ten o'clock, sitting with a young man who sipped a *bock*.

A few moments later she bade him good-night, and shook hands heartily, with a kind of recognition for the interest he had given her. Life must be made to march, and whoever gratified this craving would get his meed

of generous acknowledgment. And Wilbur felt a little of the elation of the dominant male. He was not making love; he had too little submissiveness to be a lover. Rather, he had impressed himself, and that was a necessity of his nature.

CHAPTER IV

Mr. Walter Anthon had cultivated his little garden of aspirations industriously and with flattering results. He had lately been taken on as an occasional writer for the *Standard* and was intimate with the younger gods who supported the *New National* review. To his surprise his American birth had facilitated his course: it was easier to be nice to an American (as Lady Dorant had frankly told him) than to one of your own people, for you weren't responsible for the stranger if you took him up. Again to his surprise he had found that the London world took seriously his newspaper articles on European traits. These outpourings of his first two years in London had just appeared in book form. And he had come to his family straight from Norwood, the home of the great novelist Maxwell.

Neither his family, nor Yvette Guilbert, — nor yet the custom of showing himself in Paris once in so often, — had brought him across the channel. He was eager to see Miss Molly Parker, who had occupied his heart intermittently during his calf years in America. One visit, he reflected as he waited in the chill salon of the Passy villa, would probably satisfy whatever sentiment had survived.

"Well, well, it is *so* nice to see *you*, and here in

Europe," Miss Parker emitted her welcome as she half ran down the long room. The clear, soft tones that seemed always to carry a caress, or rather a pervading sensation of warmth, invigorated the most commonplace words. Walter Anthon had always felt the immediate charm, but when once away he recalled the words, it was impossible to find anything not merely ordinary. The woman created something original out of the simple events and words of dull life. When she had disappeared the creation fell into emptiness.

The creating power lay in the slight, well-defined form, in the fine hair — that just missed being red gold — which waved over the high brows and played with the ears and neck, and in the little curves of fulness of the cheeks and neck, above all in the full grey-blue eyes which took such an absorbing interest in all things. She was a woman, now and always, — that fact so dominant in her presence eliminated any discussion of beauty. Some people, unimaginative and literal, called her plain, and talked about hands and feet and a waist much too ample, and features too heavy, and many other details, but those who had suffered her charm and remembered it, smiled — *she* would inspire a scarecrow.

"And how do you do, after all these months?" In the warmth of her special welcome Anthon forgot the little arrangement about his attitude to Miss Parker which he had made with himself. "I came from London to see you."

"No, not really." Miss Parker laughed as if it

were a delicious fib, but one she would like to believe. "That was very good of you!"

"You were going out?"

"Yes, and we will go together. To the Louvre. Just think, I have been here six weeks, and I have peeped into the Louvre but once. Mrs. Ormiston Dexter — she's my aunt whom I am travelling with — has been so miserable, and the children all had to go to the dentist's. But we shall have such a beautiful time — you will take me to see just what is best. I like to be shown things so!" Her eager eyes looked out like a child's over the prospect of a new toy. "Tell me about your year in London. What have you been doing? You never sent me any of your articles."

Anthon twisted his moustache and evaded the last reproach.

"I've met a lot of people, the right kind, who are in things," and he detailed a list of names naïvely. "They have been awfully kind and nice to me."

"Of course," Miss Parker responded slyly. She was so sympathetic, Mrs. Ormiston Dexter declared, that she would hobnob with the devil and take his views of the universe — for the time.

"So you will be a big literary man, and write books or become an editor and live in London."

"Not so fast," the young man protested. "You will make me poet laureate before you are done. I'm on the road, that is all. Now I must do something good, really good, you know, to justify all the belief those fellows have in me. But I knew enough not to stay in America.

It's the only way, to come over here and get in, get to be known and have your work talked about by the world, not write for the provinces."

"That's us?" Miss Parker inquired.

"Not you," Anthon smiled; "you belong to the woods."

"Thank you! You mean the backwoods."

"And you?" Anthon asked.

"We've done Germany and northern Italy. So many hotels and people and pictures and towns and cities. It has been *great!*" Anthon could see her at the Grand Hotel this or that, calling all the lap-dogs by their pet names, and on good terms with nearly every comer, from the fat Polish countess to the gentlemanly English loafer. "But Italy was best," her eyes softened dreamily. "The dear people, with their fat little babies, and those stagey mountains. It was like going to the opera all day long. Shall we start?"

Miss Parker chatted briskly at him, unawed by his importance, while they crawled down the Champs Elysées on the *imperiale* of an omnibus. She had scoffed at the idea of taking a cab, and forced Anthon to run the risk of being observed by his acquaintances as he swayed to and fro and clutched at his tall hat. It took them a good while to escape the importunate guides, the venders of photographs, and the other obstructions that beset the great palace.

"It's like a dance-hall outside and a tomb in," Miss Parker reflected. "All these bronzes in this heavy-arched room are such a cold welcome. They seem like a procession of the dead drawn up to receive you."

When they came to the grand staircase, with its glorious crown of the Niké, Anthon brought out some classical learning to amuse his companion with.

"What a lovely body, and what splendid wings, real angels' wings," she exclaimed unheedingly.

They paused before the mutilated Botticelli frescos, and spent some minutes tracing out the dim outlines of figures, until he persisted in comparing her with the virgin being led to the altar. Then they idly sauntered into the neighbouring French rooms, those succeeding caverns of past epochs, each one with its special manner, its own atmosphere, its individual way of putting together the minute details of life. Here and there were copyists, lazily working, chiefly old women and men, — antiquated professors who had returned to the idols of their youth. The Madame Le Bruns, the Watteaus, and Chardonels came out on the new canvases with a metallic lustre, an indecency of corporeal resurrection.

Anthon made no pretence of looking at pictures. A few schools only appealed to him, and he liked the National Gallery on pay-days when you were likely to meet people you knew and had plenty of elbow-room. This nursery-maid expedition was purely for the girl's sake; he watched her as she peered here and there and made audacious remarks. As they came out into the square hall beyond the Watteaus and Chardonels, Anthon caught sight of his uncle leaning over to examine a portrait. His manner was absorbed, as if the place had put a spell upon him and he was dreaming.

"Let's go in here," Walter Anthon said hurriedly. "The old man there is my uncle, and he is a dreadful bore."

They found themselves in the bustle of the modern French room. Here were younger copyists, ragged boys and girls, dowdy women, who idled about from easel to easel gossiping in loud tones.

"I don't believe he was a bore," Miss Parker remarked thoughtfully, "he looked like such a nice old gentleman, and rather tired."

"All my family are bores," Anthon replied deprecatingly. Miss Parker opened her eyes in surprise. "Except possibly my sister — I don't know what she will do with herself. She will probably do something idiotic, though. You ought to know her: you might do her some good, teach her to take herself more simply."

"Do you think so?" Miss Parker asked timidly.

They were standing in a corner near a small Corot that was being painfully copied by an anæmic-looking young fellow.

"I never come here," her companion continued irrelevantly, "without wondering what all these poor devils think they are doing"; he glanced about at the copyists.

"Perhaps they love it." Then she changed the topic as if aware that Anthon did not show himself at his best in his criticism of life. "Do you know a Mr. Erard?"

"My uncle knows enough about him! Devilish clever, they say. He never got on well in London, though. Something of a cad, I fancy; but I am told he knows pictures. What do you know of him?"

"I met a younger brother once. He was in a mill and got sick. I visited the family and grew to know them. Peter Erard was such a nice fellow; too good for his place. He was twenty-two and had ten dollars a week. That was what the family lived on. They talked about this older brother in Paris, who seemed such a great man in their eyes."

"My uncle helped him on, I believe. My mother is down on the old man for spending his money on the fellow. He doesn't paint so much as he writes about art."

The two passed across the great square room with its fervour of national art, its striking high-pitched tone, and nervous crowd.

"There's Adela now," Anthon exclaimed when they had entered the Long Gallery. Miss Parker looked quickly over to the tall young woman who was gazing perplexedly at a Titian. A meagre-looking man in eye-glasses was evidently discussing the picture, his fingers running up and down before the frame as if he were feeling the thing in its joints. Every now and then he applied a pair of small opera-glasses to some detail and then stepped back to his companion.

Walter Anthon walked over and spoke to his sister. She glanced up as if annoyed at any break in the mental condition, looked over to Miss Parker, measuring her swiftly, then nodded to her brother. A moment more they had crossed the room, and Anthon presented his sister.

"You were very good to come." Miss Parker looked up at the other woman trustingly, as if to say, "Of course

you are bored to be disturbed, but I want you to like me, and I guess we shall make it all right."

"You seem so interested over there," she continued, as Miss Anthon stood examining her without protesting or indulging in polite phrases. "Don't let me break it up."

"Mr. Erard was explaining to me why the picture is not a Titian. It is very complex, and I was absorbed. But I am glad to meet you." She smiled back at the smaller woman. "Won't you come over too, if you are interested in pictures. He took me first to a *real* Titian, and we spent nearly an hour over it until I got hold of some of Titian's characteristics. Now we are examining this fellow."

Erard merely nodded to the newcomers, and continued his broken monologue, largely to himself, partly to Miss Anthon.

"You see how stiffly this arm is drawn. You couldn't move that arm: it doesn't exist. Now in the real Titian I had a feeling in my right arm, a tightening up of the muscles as if they wanted to grasp the sword. This is wooden, like a piece of lath. I pass over the dead black: that may be due to the restorer. But in the application of light, Miss Anthon, you must feel how much inferior this is to the Titian. There the light was flecked on, boldly, in points. Here there is a hard, white line, mechanically traced over the corslet. The effect of the Titian is dazzling; this is metallic. And the head, Miss Anthon, — this is half a head. Just as if you should split a skull and veneer the features to

the canvas. There is no back part. Now in the Titian you could feel the rounded head; you could pat it, and fill it in for yourself. There is air all about it."

Miss Anthon followed his least motion, absorbed as over a mathematical problem in tracing his induction. "Yes, I see," she murmured.

"Let's have another look at the real Titian." Erard moved off.

"Why! they still call *this* a Titian, too," Miss Parker exclaimed incredulously. Erard shrugged his shoulders. "It will take them five years to get the label off. When I first came to Paris, they used to call this thing a Giorgione. Only last year they labelled it Bonifazio."

"Then the labels aren't right," Miss Parker remarked näively.

"Sometimes," Erard replied with a smile. Miss Parker remained absorbed in this new aspect of the world, — that it wasn't always what it pretended to be. If a thing was said, printed; if it could be seen in a book, — why it must be so. If you were to suspect the evidence of your simple senses, what a bewildering world this would be!

Erard said little more when they came to the Titian. He studied it thoughtfully with his glasses, remarking at last. "The forefinger isn't his, nor the thumb. Some bungler put that on. Well, you have seen enough for one day, Miss Anthon. Don't look at any more pictures."

Miss Parker made a little face of disappointed surprise: she was greatly interested in this new oracle.

But Miss Anthon accep[illegible]ecision as final, though her robust zest had not [illegible]ed. She turned to reëxamine Miss Parker; [illegible]hatted, as they passed down the crowde[illegible]rely testing each other, much as Er[illegible] pictures. When they reached the [illegible]d as if satisfied with their prelim[illegible]n dismissed her companion with unceremonious directness. "I want to see you again, and I shall try to find you at Passy. Good-by."

"She's got pretty thick with him already," Anthon remarked, as Erard disappeared with his sister. Miss Anthon was saying to her companion: "You have made me see so much!"

"Yes, you can see, when you are told to look," Erard assented quizzically. "If you can keep on using your eyes and not your 'intuitions,' you may know something about pictures some day."

"If you would —" she began humbly.

"Stuff!" Erard cut her short irritably. "I might teach to-day what I should deny to-morrow. Use your own wits, and hold your tongue. There is nothing so wonderful about art — in certain aspects, no Eleusinian mystery."

She was afraid to make another remark lest she might blunder. What Mr. Simeon Erard judged to be stupid was coming to have an immense weight with her. She felt grateful to him for not snubbing her badly.

CHAPTER V

Miss Anthon continued to spend a few desultory hours in the fashionable studio behind the Madeleine. Erard's raillery made the work appear more futile than ever, yet the engagement was a convenient excuse. At least once a day she could escape from Mrs. Anthon's rasping companionship, and the dressmakers and milliners and aimless scurryings to and fro. Her uncle Sebastian had hinted, also, that the first sign of restlessness on her part would precipitate a move to Nice, or some other watering-place. And, so long as Erard condescended to take an interest in her case, she was loth to leave Paris.

On brisk days, when the pervasive fog was lifted up and shoved behind the surrounding hills, Miss Anthon gave Jerome's the slip and snatched a few hours for long walks. In this way she had taken Wilbur out to the little house in Passy where Miss Molly Parker spent the burden of the day over Mrs. Ormiston Dexter's children. Wilbur and Miss Parker had dashed into a surprising intimacy from the first. Miss Anthon watched enviously the skilful American girl lead Wilbur through his most stalwart paces.

One could not help being intimate with this young woman. She was like a green field in June; when she smiled one felt at home, as one did in nature.

"You are so immensely human," Miss Anthon had been moved to say, as they left, taking Miss Parker's hands and looking into her startled eyes.

"Why? I'm just like the others," Miss Parker replied, troubled.

"With a difference," Miss Anthon sighed. "It's all straight to you; there is no doubt, no hesitation."

"Oh, lots! I am awfully poor, and if it weren't for Aunt Nan, I'd have to teach school or keep books or — get married."

"Money is so unimportant!" the other girl announced disdainfully.

"Oh, my lady, nothing, a mere trifle. *Comprenez, Monsieur Fifi,*" Miss Parker mimicked the air of disdain, taking the little black spaniel into her lap. "*C'est rien du tout, du tout,* this matter of money. *C'est une bagatelle, milady a dite. Que pensez-vous?*"

"*Au revoir,* you child." Miss Anthon kissed her.

"*Bon jour, milady.*"

Once out on the grey street, Miss Anthon turned to Wilbur for appreciation. "Well?"

"She's a good girl," Wilbur remarked abstractedly.

"That's all!"

"That's enough, isn't it? She's the sort to go through fire for one, and cook and sew and play with one, too. She's about right."

This explanation mollified Miss Anthon a little. "You make her out a companionable animal! Isn't there anything more?"

"I guess so," Wilbur replied, swinging his cane. Evi-

dently neither Miss Parker nor women in general appealed to him just then. Miss Anthon watched his moody manner sympathetically. He touched her on sides little known to herself, awakening vague instincts, appealing to a primitive nature that did not lie far below the surface of her character. His practical sense, his imagination in material issues, his enjoyment of the hearty meal in daily life, pleased her. She liked the heavy frame, the square face with its ordinary plainness and healthy tints. His tolerance of fine art tickled her humour. To him Erard's profound seriousness over these matters of adornment was ridiculous; he never allowed any conventional appreciation to disturb *him*. The face value of the world, as he looked at it, was quite satisfactory.

The day was soft for December. Mount Julien towered up beyond the river, close at hand, its fortifications lightly covered by a mantle of snow. As they came out on the Place de l'Etoile the broad avenues seemed alive with cabs. The vivacity of the scene in which she had no real share rendered her sombre.

"You had a great chance," she said at last, sighing unconsciously.

Wilbur smiled. "There are always plenty more."

"For a man, for men such as you!"

"I guess for women, too."

"Nonsense," she took him up sharply. "A husband, or a vocation badly filled. What chance is there for me?" She gave her egotism rein recklessly.

"You are pretty well off." Wilbur never wasted emotion over cultivated evils.

"Yes, too well! My brick-stock will always make me incapable of doing anything rash."

"Oh!" Wilbur turned a more curious eye on his companion. "That's the rub. You want more?"

"Or less."

"Why don't you try our new company? Dinsmore writes that the stock was issued last week. We have put only a little on the market."

"Perhaps I shall want to take a hand. Could you get me some?"

"Earnest?"

She looked at him defiantly.

"You'll have to ask your uncle. I know where you could get some — old Rantoul. But you had better stay in bricks. They're safer."

The two laughed and changed the subject. She had no very definite idea why she desired to take risks, to be richer than she was at present. It was a longing for the risk itself, as much as anything, for having a share in the palpitations of the world.

After déjeuner, when she broached the subject to her uncle, Sebastian Anthon pooh-poohed; his brother had trained him well. Brick-stock was a family god. To sell it, to dabble in other enterprises, was like trading in the family reputation. Opposition, however, made the girl truculent.

"Uncle Seb, did you never want to do anything but the safe thing?"

The old man smiled at her. "I always want the others to do the safe thing."

"Do you think it would make a nice world if every one did the safe thing and rested there?"

"I don't know," he mused, "there are always plenty to do the unsafe thing, to make the ventures — and the world is not an over-nice place."

She looked at him without replying.

"Adela, I am afraid you will explode some day. Put the explosion off, lessen it, deaden it. Some one is generally hurt when there is an explosion."

She laughed at his figure. A few days later, however, the matter came up again unexpectedly. It was between the acts at the opera. Miss Anthon and Wilbur were walking up and down the foyer, having left Mrs. Anthon over a cooling drink.

"Do you want that stock?" Wilbur remarked abruptly. "When you first spoke of it the other day, it meant nothing to *me*," he explained. "But Dinsmore has been acting queerly, booming things before they are ripe. Perhaps he thinks he can get out and take his profits before we have had a real trial and are on a safe footing. I must cut home at once, and try to keep my end up. Now Center and I control a third; Rantoul has another third. Dinsmore runs Rantoul. I must run Rantoul — you see?"

The girl nodded.

"This is only a side-show for Dinsmore," Wilbur continued moodily, "but it's my chance. I must have a hand on Rantoul; if I can't bully him, buy him out."

Miss Anthon understood swiftly the implications. She might become Wilbur's partner. Boldly stated,

such a proposition sounded indelicate, but this imputation amused her.

"How much would that take?"

"About fifty thousand."

That was a sobering answer. One-third of her brick-stock, and bricks paid their assured twelve per cent. For a moment she trembled and was inclined to take refuge in Uncle Sebastian's advice. Then her blood leapt again to her pulses. Some bars of Tristan surged through her, inciting her to venture, to play with the world somehow.

"Once in the saddle," continued Wilbur, speciously, "and given a proper time for development, your fifty thousand ought to more than double."

"And if I don't do it," her eyes questioned him.

"Why! I take my chances of finding somebody else who will," he retaliated. His assurance in his own control of this world's affairs made it impossible for him to realize the risk he was urging her to take.

"I'll do it." Miss Anthon caught her breath. "I will put fifty thousand in the company. I am of age, twenty-two. All my family are independent. I shall have enough left, in — in case — "

Wilbur looked puzzled at all this confession.

"And I do it because I believe in you. I want to share with you in your fight and feel that I count for something in this world."

This was also a little vague and childish. Wilbur on his part showed no signs of obligation. He had treated her as openly as he would the best of his friends, and

all at once they seemed to grow intimate. He unfolded swiftly his course of action, the reasons for his belief in the future. When the bell sounded, and they were back once more in the cramped *loge,* Miss Anthon felt indebted to him already for this chance of equality.

The next morning she announced her decision to her mother and uncle, almost indifferently, as they were eating breakfast in their private salon. Mrs. Anthon screamed. "Ada, you are crazed! Sebastian, she shan't do it. There was my aunt's husband — he sold his stock at 75 in the panic of eighty-three, against poor John's advice —" It was a long story, this tale of the aunt's husband — and well known in the family. Adela Anthon listened dreamily. She had always rather sympathized with Isaac Nash for daring to rebel against the autocrat.

Sebastian Anthon's protest, backed up by business details, by unfavourable remarks on skyrocket companies, was more weighty. At last he said wearily: "Why do you want to bother with money matters? It's a tiresome business at best, and when you are pleasantly out of it, all safe, why can't you use your energies in some other way?"

"How?" the young woman gazed at him searchingly. He shifted uneasily and glanced at his sister-in-law. "In art?" Miss Anthon pursued, "in encouraging young artists instead of young financiers?"

"You have begun to explode, Adela," the old man replied with gentle humour. "Be careful about it, and remember, it doesn't pay, it doesn't pay."

"Does the other thing pay?"

He was silent.

When Wilbur came by appointment an hour later, Mrs. Anthon restrained herself with difficulty from breaking out in reproaches. Her daughter watched her closely, with a determined face. She had to content herself by rushing past Wilbur brusquely without a word of greeting or good-by.

Wilbur was not too blind to see that he was *persona non grata;* Sebastian Anthon's chill politeness was enough to indicate the family attitude. But his absorption in the plans for the coming campaign made it easy to take Mrs. Anthon's snub and the old man's suspicious airs. When the two young people were left alone, Wilbur remarked apologetically, —

"You have been awfully plucky."

"What about?" Miss Anthon replied shortly.

"The row your new investment has made. I am sorry your mother and uncle don't see it the way we do; but, then, they couldn't be expected to."

"No, they couldn't."

"Well, let 'em wait a year, — wait six months, — and they'll whistle a different tune. But you," Wilbur looked at her with frank admiration, the first time he had done so without other preoccupation. He had all along taken it for granted that she was "a live girl," as he would have called her in Michigan. Now she appeared to him as more than that; she was as full of venture, as keenly alive, as he, besides being competent in the woman's part of knowing how to dress and to talk entertainingly on many topics. He appreciated the fact

that she had been able to handle both him and Erard impartially. As they talked over the last details, — he was to leave that night for Southampton, — the idea of her courage and her cleverness brought out his admiration increasingly. She seemed to have mastered the fine details of the irrigation problem. She knew as well as he the ins and outs of Dinsmore's character, and she gave him shrewd advice how to play his cards.

When all was talked out, Wilbur found it difficult to make the good-by. He was anxious to express many shades of feeling at once, and he felt incapable of the necessary delicacy.

"You have been a sandy friend," he began.

"Stop," she laughed. "Remember I am a partner, and we mustn't have any sentiment."

"That's all right," he rose to her point, "but if I need another spur in my side I've got it; and when we've made the game, I shall know who gave me the boost at the right moment."

"And I — who made life interesting when it began to hang heavy; and to whom I owe my princely fortune!"

A woman could be very chummy with Wilbur without opening the way to emotional complexities. His education in a part of the world where women are accepted as comrades (with certain advantages of sex) made him companionable. He had always acted with young women on a frankly human basis at home, or in his university; he had seen so little of them in the conventional attitude that he was never the lover. Nevertheless, this good-by included long pauses. At last he said, —

"When the stock is selling at one twenty-five you will see me again. Not before. And," he proceeded slowly, "then I shall have another scheme to propose."

Miss Anthon was vexed with herself at her sudden blush.

"I haven't any business to be talking *now* about — well — I can't help, though, letting you know how it stands."

"Perhaps it would be best not to complicate affairs," Miss Anthon responded coldly, having gained control of the situation once more.

"No, no, but," he added irrelevantly, "you are a great woman. You can get what you have a mind to. Good-by."

He held out his hand. She shook it cordially, exhilarated by his frank appreciation. "And a quick return, shall I say?"

His face beamed; in a moment she was angry with herself for her unconsidered remark. "Why, of course I am anxious to hear that my stock is selling at one twenty-five. But perhaps a letter would do as well."

Yet when he had gone, his solid presence and dominating assurance once out of the stuffy little room of rasping red velours, she had a strange sensation of emptiness. Wilbur's connection with the ordinary facts of existence seemed so immediate and normal. She was more convinced than ever that she had done shrewdly in linking her fortunes with his. Whatever came of the dollars, she would be a larger woman from having grasped hands intimately with this plain person.

CHAPTER VI

After Wilbur's departure for Chicago on his quest for two fortunes, Miss Anthon came to see much of Simeon Erard; she accepted him more easily, now that the young business man's normal humour was not present to supply a good-natured criticism. Erard was training her, she told Mrs. Anthon when she was in a provoking mood. He was teaching her what to see and how to see it. More subtly, he was training her in values.

Erard had shown her the famous new picture by Degas; what was more exciting, had presented the painter himself. One clear day he had taken her out to a quiet studio at Passy, where she had seen a great master at work on a fresco for an American building. Again, they had visited old Sader at work on his marvellous gates, which had been on the way for a dozen years. Sader seemed to her a very undistinguished person, — thickset, with a long grizzled beard, and like a tradesman in his cotton blouse. The sculptor shut the door after them and locked it; and, as if to waive commonplaces, pointed to the famous gates. While she was speculating over these huge clay panels, which seemed to her roughly broken by scrolls and dashes, Sader mumbled, "One is Fire; the other Water — Dante." Then Erard pointed here and there to strange

little figures, flung on, stuck on carelessly, as if attached to the panels by chance when finished. Each figure, part worm, part man, seemed to writhe in agony. When her eyes wandered over the gates, they presented the blur she had first caught. She felt disappointed with herself and ashamed of her feeble imagination.

Erard and Sader came to her rescue by calling her attention to other pieces of work, — heads of children, fauns, half-completed allegories. In an adjoining room a young man, who looked like an intelligent workman, was slowly chiselling at the curls of a head. Erard pointed out another subject, which she thought was half-finished, — a delicate head emerging, as from a lake, out of the hard white block. The pure bold outline of the face, the features scraped to an ascetic thinness, were accentuated by the roughness of the unfinished marble. Near by was a group, a man and a woman in a convulsive embrace, half caught in the marble, half emergent, as if struggling in all their tense limbs to escape from the bondage of the stone.

"That's his trick," whispered Erard, when Sader had withdrawn to the gates. "A kind of impressionism in marble. He does a lot of these little things. You can call 'em what you like, — Adam and Eve, Paola and Francesca, Life and Death."

Miss Anthon looked puzzled and hopeless at his blasphemy. Authority still counted for much in her mind. The sculptor returned to bow them out, with the same fat, complacent smile with which he had welcomed them.

"The old fool will live to see his stuff despised," Erard remarked carelessly, when they were on the street again. "They are all trying to tell their story in another language, straining to utter the impossible. But Matthews isn't. He's the American you made so much of in New York and Chicago. *He* doesn't try any experiments, — he knows too much finance for that, — but he tells the whole story. Dancing girls and little boys and Venuses, — the usual outfit, as Wilbur would say."

Then they crossed the Quarter to Matthews' studio, which was a much more habitable place than Sader's chilly shed. They found the sculptor entertaining a fashionably dressed woman and her escort. This Mrs. Warmister, whom Erard seemed to know rather intimately, was poking about the studio in a nervous manner, emitting now and then admiring exclamations. The young man with an impressive manner — Erard called him Salters — tried clumsily to follow her inconsequential chatter. The sculptor smoked a cigarette with a bored air, while engaging in the elusive talk. "This kind of person infests the studios," Erard whispered to his companion, indicating the voluble Mrs. Warmister. "She booms Matthews, socially, and all that."

After a short chat with Matthews, who made Miss Anthon feel that she was at an afternoon tea, they drove back towards the busy avenues along the river.

"He makes his ten thousand a year," Erard commented. "Nothing there you couldn't take in at a glance. The glorification of the obvious." In the intervals of street-racket Erard's phrases dropped like

little pieces of hail. "But he is on a safer road than old Sader. He has stuck to the tradition of his art, not tried to paint with a chisel or to tell stories with a brush."

Miss Anthon was depressed and silent. The conflict of theories and ideals, instead of exciting her, as at first, was subduing. "There's something suggestive to me in Sader's place, though," she remonstrated at last. "We are all striving for some kind of freedom, for some escape, and his figures make you feel that impulse."

When the cab stopped at her hotel, she remembered gratefully that Mrs. Anthon had sallied forth with an acquaintance for the afternoon.

"So you are searching for the means to express an unutterable longing?" Erard questioned mischievously, when they were alone.

She looked at him restlessly before replying, then said impulsively, —

"Shall I ever do anything? Tell me — what is there for me?"

She was leaning on her folded arms, her short coat thrown open negligently, her hat laid aside. Her black eyes gleamed with the intense interest of her appeal. Erard measured her face before he replied. Her hair waved back over her head in thick, rich brown masses. The upper part of the face was thin, mobile, but he noticed for the first time that the chin and jaw overbalanced the other features.

"Why are you anxious to get more than the phrases? to talk 'art' fluently when you are over there?" — he

pointed vaguely across the boulevard. "You can do that now pretty well. When you are married, and have your palace in St. Louis or Chicago, you can pay ten times what it's worth for the truck you buy of us. You can become the patroness."

Miss Anthon drew back, hurt, vexed at her childish confidence. "At least I shall know what to look for in those I patronize. And I am not as simple as you seem to think."

The sting pleased Erard. "You have come into the procession too late to do anything," he continued more seriously. "You should have begun with your parents and your grandparents; they became unfortunately prosperous and lived where their senses were dulled."

"Can I not make up for them?"

"Only in part. We Americans like to think, as your friend Wilbur does, that we can get anything on earth we want. Europe is our Sphinx; we never penetrate the riddle. While we are making toys, up springs some offspring of these 'effete' nations and accomplishes like a giant."

"Some American women do succeed. There is Mrs. Ralston Brown," Miss Anthon retorted defiantly. She had gone to the master for confession, and he dealt her out sneers. "And why were the salons last spring full of foreign work? Why do the French critics howl for protection for French artists?"

"Do you want to paint jaunty, slap-dash portraits like Mrs. Brown's 'A Poet'? Because if you do, I will promise you a picture in the Champ de Mars in five years."

The bewildered expression settled down on her face again. Mrs. Ralston Brown was an instance of feminine ability of which she was proud.

"No, no," Erard continued, sipping at his tea. "Don't believe the journalists of life. Really we Americans have done nothing but journalism in the arts. Certainly many of the 'smart' things in the salons this season, every season, are signed with American names."

He continued to lecture her in his bitter strain. Her head ached over conflicting thoughts, and she wished he would leave her. "Not that we shouldn't try!" he threw out, at last, as a sop to her prejudices. "But try, my young lady, in a way that our lordly race is too impatient to suffer."

"What do you mean?" She fancied that he had a new theory of training to suggest.

"Learn something. Not pose in the ridiculous belief that our genius will create a universe all for ourselves. New experiments, new inventions in education and art, — we patent 'em by hundreds, — as if one could invent the strands of a cable that anchors the ship."

Miss Anthon followed him eagerly; now the comforting definite word was to be spoken. "And I personally? what am I to do?" she asked insistently.

"You are an ignorant young person."

She nodded humbly.

"After learning a little French and German, less Latin, in some place where they have lectures and go about in caps and gowns, you went to an art-school for a year or two. In the place you called a college, you

were taught a little advanced algebra and a survey of European history; perhaps some lackadaisical young man taught you to 'love' Tennyson and Browning. Now, chance having brought you to Europe, you undertake 'art' in the same fashion of godlike heedlessness."

Miss Anthon winced and then laughed. "That's about so," she admitted.

"And really all you want out of 'art' or anything else is amusement, and — gratification for your vanity."

"You think that is all? Well, you have taken the — the — "

She could have cried. Erard suggested another topic.

"Why do our Amazons despise the other *rôle!* Isn't it enough to be clever and charming and a woman?"

She looked at his ungainly figure, and curled her lip haughtily. If *that* were her inevitable career, she would not spend herself on him. "You mean something between a politician in petticoats and a dabbler in art!"

"Well, one of these days we shall see you, running your little piece of the world over there, like our friend Wilbur. An 'authority' on 'art,' a great reader of papers before clubs, and an 'organizer,' and a 'power.' A gracious, energetic woman, who knows how to make good looks imposing, to order a large house and make herself felt in her neighbourhood, — an important career I am sketching for you. *Voila!*"

He rose with a disagreeable, high-pitched laugh. Irony was his keenest weapon. It rendered him invulnerable, because it placed "the others" in a category by themselves — deluded simpletons, who had his

sympathy. Miss Anthon felt the mortification of being included among "the others."

"You have been very good to take me about," she said simply, with reserves of dignity, "and to tell me so plainly that I am a — fool. I shall have to leave you now to dress for dinner."

When Erard had gone, she struggled to support her pride. How deluded she had been to think that he could find anything important in her, or could be interested in her abilities! Like a silly country girl, she had been dreaming of — well, making a noise in the world. She could never endure to see him again, for he had read her character too easily. And he was right in thinking her ridiculous. She was crude: how the work she had seen at the studios had puzzled her! Finally she resolved to see him again, to show him that she had sense enough left to laugh at her own folly.

CHAPTER VII

THE more Miss Anthon thought the matter over, the more completely she came to accept Erard's bitter lesson. She realized that her blindness had been childish, and that by opening her eyes he had saved her many futile hours. Now that she was content to put away vain personal aspirations Erard condescended to spend more time than ever with her. Mrs. Anthon grumbled insistently at this increasing intimacy, and, as her sneers had little effect on her daughter, inflicted her grievances upon her brother-in-law. "Sebastian," she warned him, "Adela is fooling away her time with nobodies. She has had about enough of this art business and of your Erard. You know I only want the best for my children, and I have never crossed her anywheres. But that man has altogether too much influence with her. She may start up any day and do some crazy thing, as she did about Wilbur. She may take it into her head to marry Erard!" Mrs. Anthon gasped at the enormity of her own imagination.

"He had the brass," she explained to her son, "to want Sebastian to take him to Spain this spring, along with Ada and me."

"You must do him the justice," the old man smiled,

"to admit that he didn't put it exactly that way; in fact, the proposition was made by me."

"I knew what he was after," Mrs. Anthon continued; "he just pulls you around."

Yet had Mrs. Anthon been aware of the sum of Erard's preaching, she could hardly have found it heterodox. It was a less practical and blunt phrasing of her own aspirations. For she had dreamed in an ignorant delusion that Europe meant inevitable matrimony for a good-looking American girl with some money. Before her husband's death she would have been satisfied with a homely domestic match, but travel had expanded her views. She threatened now to remove Adela to Aix-les-Bains when the season opened.

Why Mrs. Anthon had selected Aix-les-Bains was a mystery to every one but her daughter, who knew that on the steamer her mother had become enamoured of a globe-trotting New York woman. In the long hours of confidential chat, when the ennui of steamer life causes women to enter upon the confidences of the deathbed, Mrs. King Hamilton had learned the Anthon situation minutely. Mrs. King Hamilton had advised Aix-les-Bains, and marriage for the daughter *via* A. l. B. She cited numerous acquaintances whose daughters had imbibed matrimony at Aix-les-Bains. But if nothing came of that venture, there was Trouville, and then London, where Mrs. Anthon could count on the old intimacy between her husband and the present ambassador. Thus Sebastian Anthon, wistfully looking Spainwards, and Adela Anthon, satisfied to remain indefinitely in

Paris, were being persistently shoved towards Aix-les-Bains.

"Well, Sebastian," Mrs. Anthon concluded defiantly on one occasion after they had been over the old ground, "you can give Erard notice that *we* shan't put ourselves in his paws. Ada is off with him now at Durand-Ruell's to look at some picture no young girl ought to look at with a man. He will entrap her into a low marriage."

Mrs. Anthon worked on her amiable brother-in-law's nerves. Few things in life seemed to him worth standing out for against the acid speech of his brother John's wife. He was tempted to sneak off to Spain by himself after all, but he reflected that such a course would leave Adela in the lurch. Moreover, a marriage with Erard was a possible eccentricity. His niece had begun to explode. She might explode further in this direction — and that would not be best, on the whole. After a few weeks of vacillation, during which his defence of Erard weakened under Mrs. Anthon's robust attacks, he was driven to take aggressive measures.

It was a dull March day when he betook himself to Erard's apartment. The boulevards seemed to weep, and the few pedestrians were scuffling along as if abject poverty were their sole excuse for being out on foot in such weather. The old man had made up his mind what to do, painfully, because he disliked change of any kind in itself, and especially did he shrink from taking harsh measures with this protégé. Severity in Erard's case was like cruelty to his own youth.

Erard was taking his coffee in the salon in company

with Mrs. Warmister and Salters. Sebastian Anthon knew Mrs. Warmister by reputation. She had been married to a quiet iron manufacturer a dozen years ago. Mrs. Warmister had been much in evidence ever since, but no one ever heard of the iron man. It was generally reported that the couple were not divorced,—not from any fault of hers, the less well informed said; the better informed held that husband and wife understood each other.

"Perhaps she will take him over," the old man reflected, as he exchanged greetings with the excitable, effusive woman. "How homely, after all the fuss over her," he concluded, watching the dark lines of the jaded face.

They were discussing some purchase that Mrs. Warmister had in mind. Salters was delivering his opinion in a ponderous voice.

"Really, my dear Mrs. Warmister, you couldn't take that back with you. It would be positively wicked to hang it. We *know* it isn't a Vandyke, don't we, Erard?"

Pity, Mr. Anthon mused, that Erard should be thrown into *her* hands. She looked so—cheap. Mrs. Warmister's face wore a perpetual grimace. She had been told that her power lay in expression, and consequently she had cultivated a distressingly perpetual mobility.

"Don't let her do it, Erard," the heavy young man pleaded with pathetic intensity. "Think what it means for our reputation as connoisseurs."

"Well!" Mrs. Warmister rose, laughing nervously.

"Whatever Mr. Erard decides, I suppose I shall do. I am in his hands." Then she departed, taking the urgent Mr. Salters with her.

"Two idiots gone," Erard sighed. "Salters is a New York man, a nobody with money, who has been over here a dozen years trying to learn something about fine art. He knows a lot of people and gives dinners. One has to tolerate the ass — he brings in game. The woman might know something; but she is crazy for *réclame.* They say she hires the Paris *Herald* to publish a paragraph about her once a week, no matter how scandalous. She turns up about every year, and I have to take her around. She buys whatever I tell her to."

While Erard flung out these biographical items, he was arranging photographs on a large rack that stood like a desk in one corner of the room, where the best daylight reached it.

"These are the things at Madrid," he explained casually. "Half these Goyas must be spurious. He is an intricate person, though."

Sebastian Anthon glanced at the photographs nervously. "I am afraid I shan't be able to take the Spanish trip. My sister-in-law has her mind made up on Rome and then some watering-places, and I am over here this time for her and my niece."

Although Erard made no sign, his hands came to a pause. Mr. Anthon began again, sighing. "I came over to have a general talk, Erard."

The young man turned from the rack and motioned his visitor to a chair.

"These other — well, less definite occupations, seem to take more of your time and attention. You don't paint as much as you did."

Erard waited, thereby increasing the old man's embarrassment. "I know your idea — education, but it means less active — accomplishment. You don't paint, you know." He ended with this feeble reiteration. Still Erard kept a mouselike silence.

"You may be right. I don't pretend to know. I shouldn't want to interfere. But — well — I think we should terminate our — "

Erard moved his hand lightly, as if to spare the further embarrassment of explicit statement. "Of course!"

"I have been tremendously interested in you, my boy," Mr. Anthon continued more easily, "and I am now. So I thought I wouldn't write it." He smiled sweetly. "Now, you mustn't take it hard or be disturbed. I shall have a hundred or two at my banker's — "

Erard protested. "No; that will not be necessary."

Mr. Anthon's face clouded over. He had evidently bungled. Yet he was secretly glad to have this evidence of right feeling to throw at his sister-in-law.

"Don't be in haste about it. You will find the money there in case you need it."

"I shall not draw another penny. It would be quite impossible — now that I have lost your sympathy."

Perhaps Mrs. Warmister has already taken him over, the old man reflected uncomfortably. They talked for a few minutes of other matters. Then, as he rose to leave and buttoned up his frockcoat, he glanced about the

charming rooms. The possibility of Erard's difficulties troubled him.

"My boy," he said, with a winning smile, as they stood in the hall. "My boy," he laid his hand lightly on Erard's thin shoulder. "Believe me, I want to do the best thing for you. And you must take the money, two or three hundred at least, you must — "

Erard shook his head, as if annoyed, and said in his most mincing tones, —

"When you are in Rome, can you find out for me whether they have taken away that Francia in the Borghese. I'll write you a note of it. Good-by."

Mr. Anthon went out into the dull March twilight, sad at heart. "He'll have to beg of others, and that will be worse." He reflected that his "doing the best" for Erard was due largely to his sister-in-law's nagging. "Poor John," he murmured, "what a wife!"

He tried to excuse himself on the score of his niece. "If it hadn't been for Adela, I wouldn't have thought of it." For, however liberally he might regard Erard, he couldn't welcome him as Adela's husband.

CHAPTER VIII

Miss Molly Parker was a unifying force in the Anthon family. Mrs. Anthon and Molly had discovered two common passions, dress and food. They would spend long mornings driving about to shops, discussing bargains and prices and subtleties of style. And they had tested and classified a long list of restaurants. Molly was a gourmand; Mrs. Anthon called herself "a hearty eater." Whatever was amiable and warm-hearted in Mrs. Anthon, the enthusiastic young woman brought out. "Molly really likes her," Miss Anthon admitted gratefully, "and mamma behaves better when she is about."

Sebastian Anthon, also, in his quiet fashion, paid tribute to the new friend. He took her on long walks, and frequently of a Sunday morning he appeared in Passy with large boxes of chocolate from the *Coup d'Or*. The two roamed over old Paris, followed the shop windows, and knew the recesses of many a printshop. "Your dear old uncle has walked his feet off," Miss Parker would exclaim on their return. "He's such a dear!"

Molly Parker knew all about Erard and Wilbur, about the Water-Hoister and the new company. Miss Anthon spent many a morning, these early spring days,

in the little garden behind the Passy house, finding there a peaceful atmosphere of rest and naturalness. The studio had grown loathsome since Erard had delivered his opinion on her case. A few days after the family conference Miss Anthon brought out with her Wilbur's first report of affairs in Chicago. It was buoyant. Miss Parker sighed a little enviously.

"How nice it must be to be rich!"

"What would you do if you were rich?"

Miss Parker opened her eyes enthusiastically.

"I'd buy trunkfuls of these fascinating things," she held up a chemise they had been examining. "And some dresses, I suppose, though I don't care for dresses so much as all the white things, with lace and embroidery." Then her eyes grew thoughtful as she contemplated more permanent acquisitions. "I would have a cottage in the country, somewhere in the woods, and I would have pigs and horses and cows and chickens and roses and dogs. And have all white dimity, you know. Coffee in bed and nothing to do all the morning but putter around."

Adela Anthon laughed. "Wouldn't you like to be a man?"

Miss Parker opened a pair of astonished eyes. "Why? I should have to work, and I couldn't wear dresses. Do you know the story about the monkeys? If they showed they could work they would have to do something. See? So they have never let on what they could do. Terrible wise, the monkeys."

"Well, I suppose you will marry."

"I suppose so," she sighed. "Mrs. Dexter thinks I am hard to suit. They say I am flirtatious and not serious; but I have to let the men talk. I can't tell whether a man will be *the right one* until he has made love to me. You see when a nice young man comes along I think he may be *the one*, and he interests me terribly. I let him talk and talk, and then when he proposes he scares me, for I find I don't want him. It's so hard to get rid of them nicely without hurting their pride too much. Mrs. Dexter says I shall be an old maid, and it will all be my own fault. I haven't any money, she says, and only enough good looks to carry me a little way, and no accomplishments. I shouldn't be so stuck on myself. But I can't help it, and I suppose I may be an old maid. Wouldn't it be awful, though, not to be married in the end, and not to have any kids?"

Miss Anthon kissed her laughingly. "No danger! What did you do with Walter? Did he propose this time?"

Miss Parker looked at her friend slyly, until the two laughed again nervously. "He doesn't really want to do anything so rash. It would be nice to be your sister. Not if you should marry Erard, though."

Miss Anthon moved nervously. "There's little danger! He has dismissed me from serious consideration, told me I was an idiot."

"But you couldn't anyway," Miss Parker protested. "He is so *queer*."

"It would be worth doing to see how Walter would

take it. But the family have banished him somehow; or, perhaps, he has become tired of my crudity."

The spring sunshine tempted her to stroll homewards through the Bois, which was deserted at this hour except by a few waddling children with their nurses, or an occasional bicyclist on his way to the country. The ground steaming in the midday warmth gave out enticing suggestions of woodland things, of wild fields and rocks, with deep pastures between. For the moment Paris was quite intolerable, and the life of "hanging on the outskirts of art" (as Erard had described her existence) too mortifying to endure. She was almost at the point when it would be more tolerable to return to America, to "become interested in church work," or to accept any form of the inevitable commonplace. There was but one distinctly agreeable sensation, beyond the comfort of the day and the pleasure of a cool shirt-waist and rough skirt, and that was in the shape of a letter from Wilbur which sent an invigorating thrill over her egotistical musings. It was an exuberant, yet curt, business letter, written on a broad sheet of paper with an elaborate lithograph head, representing curious machines; a letter dashed off in the sweat and hurly-burly of success when actions were so full that words seemed colourless counters. The initial moves had been properly played. Wilbur had arrived in time.

"I stopped in Boston and saw the Rantoul man on my way out. So I arrived primed. Dinsmore smiled when he saw I had the drop on him and wanted to know *how*. Then I smiled. . . ." There was a paragraph of hastily

sketched plans, a few words about the headquarters in Chicago already started, possible immediate extension into new industrial fields, etc. He was about to start for Kansas. At the close came, "Stock is selling at 50; I bought yours at 30." Nothing but that scrap of justification tucked in, which he knew would delight her, not for the money gained, but for the justification itself, — the pleasure of triumphing over Mrs. Anthon and Sebastian Anthon. Here in the dainty solitude of the play-wood, it was delightful to follow the details of this man's rapid, virile action: the conferences, the skilful guidance, the quick judgment, the importance of making a right decision on the moment. Confidence in one's powers was life, freedom. She breathed more rapidly as her imagination filled in the scant letter. Then she sighed unconsciously.

For she was tied. She was merely a distant spectator at the commercial game. From envy of the male part in it, she began to speculate on this man Wilbur, imaginatively accrediting him with great qualities. Yet, clearly, it was not the moneymaking that she cared for, but the drama, — where dollars were the figures of speech.

"Anyhow, *that*," she spoke aloud, meaning the partnership with Wilbur, "has been thoroughly worth while."

With this consoling reflection she picked up her first business letter, and turned towards the nearest city gate, choosing the least sophisticated paths. As she neared the Porte Maillot, at a bend in the woodpath, she came upon Erard walking slowly, seemingly still on tiptoe, as if eyeing through his little glasses some *belle œuvre* of

nature, yet in puzzlement, tugging thoughtfully at his beard. Her first impulse to wait until Erard had passed on around the next curve, gave way to a quick resolution. If she was to leave Paris in a few days she would want to write or say farewell: why not here, without incurring a further outbreak from her mother? There had been no sentimental flutters in her relations with Erard; indeed, in all she had not seen him so very many times, although each interview had seemed to her to mark a little epoch in her intellectual life. So she kept up her pace and overtook him.

"It is a good place to say good-by in," she remarked carelessly, as he raised his hat in his awkward schoolboy fashion. "You know my mother has coerced us, Uncle Sebastian and me. We are to be carried to Rome and then to some dreadful baths."

Erard smiled maliciously. "Mrs. Anthon and I are of the same opinion."

Miss Anthon laughed pleasantly at the idea of her mother agreeing with any belief advanced by Simeon Erard.

"Matrimony," he added with a slight sneer, "not art, will be your fittest medium of expression."

Miss Anthon's face twitched nervously. "I am really too happy this morning to reprove you, over good news." She explained her letter.

"And I am sad, over news of my immediate bankruptcy!" Erard responded gaily.

Although nothing explicit had been said to her by her mother or uncle, Miss Anthon had gathered from broad

hints that Mrs. Anthon had brought about some kind of a catastrophe in Erard's affairs.

"Why don't you take your own advice?" Miss Anthon hazarded, assuming his tone of hilarity.

"Matrimony! Passing over the insult you have deftly insinuated, I should say merely that the solution of a rich wife would offer too many difficulties. Of course I have entertained the idea several times, and each time I have definitely put it aside. Between the two evils of a patron and a wife, the first is less limiting. Marriage with the ordinary woman of fortune would spoil my work; it would demand time,—beyond the mere emotional adjustment which might disturb my intellectual processes. I cannot afford to marry even the ideal heiress. If I could find a partner who would be of substantial assistance at the plough as well as provide pottage—like these French women—ah! that would be another thing. But that kind of arrangement, you may conceive, is hard to make."

"I admire your frankness and your method!" the young woman exclaimed.

"I am not stupid—over stupid, Miss Anthon," Erard went on coolly. "I understand exactly the contempt a woman like your mother has for me, also the gossip my way of life furnishes my good friends. I am an adventurer. I came from a nasty back street of Jersey City, and according to report, I have managed to make the world support me in luxurious idleness. Why, only last week your uncle, that dear, gentle, old Mr. Anthon, said: 'See here, my boy, I can't conscientiously go on

supporting you over here and lending my reputation towards getting you patrons. You are enjoying the cream, — just the kind of life dozens of young men, sons of my acquaintances, are sighing for.' 'And,' he implied, 'you have nothing to show for it. If you were doing like the others, now, something Bohemian, and bringing out results' — you know the story."

"Well, why not?" Miss Anthon stopped her leisurely pace. "What's your passport?"

"You, too, can take that tone?" he glanced at her searchingly. "My passport is *here*," he tapped himself, half ironically, "which, by the way, is the same passport that carried your young friend Wilbur through his difficulties. Don't you suppose that I realize all this suspicion and contempt? that I know well enough that the kicking is waiting for me if I fail in the end?

"But there will be no failure," he continued, impressively. "I have taken the right road. I haven't any time for silly scruples — for money-getting. That faculty of scraping up dollars is an inferior one, and those who have it must contribute to *me*. The world *shall* support me; it shall give me my time — that's the great luxury — and my peace, too, until in my own way I have completed my work. Some century hence your uncle will be known by a footnote in my biography. And one should not grudge a heavy payment for fame, however it may come or however modest it may be."

Miss Anthon was impressed by the fervour of the man's passion for his own life, by his unbounding egotism, by his force. It excited her in much the same way that

Wilbur's little epic had excited her; only, with this difference: here was a creed, a consistent valuation of facts. And this creed seemed grander, vaguer, with limitless ends. It demanded more faith from its believers, but for that reason it was not unacceptable to a woman.

"The world must believe in you, like a prophet without works, at present. Success is its own justification. Yet that is a brutal doctrine," the girl mused.

"It is a great law of life," Erard asserted, "both for the despot and the stock-broker."

"I believe it," she assented. "I believe you. Of course accidents may come, such as disease or death, leaving you a wreck with a broken reputation. But that is the risk you take voluntarily, as well as the pain of always being a dependent. You have no time to make compromises with life, to spend your strong, creative years earning your freedom. You are right!"

Her sympathy, always so ready to go out to anything which promised relief from triviality, invested Erard with the interest of a hero. What he might accomplish ultimately, its value to himself, to others, intrinsically, was a small matter. He despised the world, treated it haughtily, and that was enough for her. It was pleasant, too, to know that she might possibly have a share in this large venture, just as she had taken part in Wilbur's crisis. Erard was still within her range.

And Erard, himself, was the most interesting man she had ever known. Her pride was exquisitely flattered at the thought of her own emancipation in sympathizing with him thus instead of despising him. She could

hold him, as it were, aloof, and judge him as the others, morally, according to the old code; and then accept him when he tickled her intellect.

Erard took her into his confidence as one who was liberal enough to understand his case. He took pains to explain his reasons for drawing away from painting and enlarging his critical field — some of the reasons. He talked freely, without irony now, partly from a natural yearning to justify and magnify his sinuous existence, and partly because this eager-minded woman was the much-beloved niece of Sebastian Anthon. He charmed her with intimate confessions.

"The thing that must stand out from me embodied — mine, yet not mine, — cannot be born from nothing, from unconscious nature. Into me must enter a knowledge of past experiments . . . man cannot cut himself off from the tradition; he can only push on a step beyond."

To her excited imagination this vague doctrine implied a new great art. He described his manner of approach in large phrases, and with bravado told how he had "cultivated his receptive powers as delicately as a French market-garden. To have a most finely sensitive sensorium — that is the first necessity. Now I am schooled," he ended cynically, "they tell me, 'Use yourself in teaching or painting portraits of corpses like Mrs. Warmister. Turn your nicely sharpened sword to whittling wood.' Never!"

"Cutting beefsteaks would be a truer figure," Miss Anthon suggested, with a laugh to lower the tension.

"You have let me make a fool of myself!"

"No—I have almost made a fool of *myself.*" She quickened her pace; both speculated for a silent minute on what she meant. She felt that she was dangerously near another explosion, and she was struggling for time to take a calm look.

"But one doesn't mind playing the fool before you, for you are so superbly tolerant," Erard ventured.

She flushed. "Horribly crude, though, you told me the other day."

"To set you on the right road," he answered quickly, "and not let you run to waste."

"Then I am some good?" she stopped and faced him nervously.

"You have the great rebellion," he answered impressively.

"Yes," she exclaimed, surprised at his divination. "Something makes me sympathetic with any rebellion. I feel as if I wanted to take the present in my hands and crush it. And you are responsible for unchaining the animal in me, for rousing an appetite. I shall die if I can't feed the animal somehow!"

He looked at her quietly, reassuringly. Then they continued on their way to the Porte Maillot. Erard had added another member to his chorus.

CHAPTER IX

WHEN Miss Anthon reached the hotel, she found her mother and the newly imported maid bustling over trunks.

"Your uncle received a cable this morning that calls him home on important business," Mrs. Anthon explained, "and I thought we might as well move on at the same time. Just as well for Sebastian to be out of that fellow's way."

"Does uncle mean to leave him to starve?" Miss Anthon inquired quickly.

"Starve or work, I guess. That's the law in this world."

Miss Anthon went into her own room without further words. Her mother's remark suddenly gave point to the vague impulses of the hour's talk with Erard. She must come to a decision at once.

As she sat down by her table with a sheet of letter-paper ready, she paused, for the act which she meditated might cost her much more than money. Should she offer him support bluntly, or try some other means — her uncle, perhaps? What gossip might say did not trouble her. But a draft sent and accepted, that closed any other possibility. There was no other possibility *now*. She might never love him. Should she love him, why need the

fact that she had helped him, alter their relations? In the gamble of life she happened to have superfluous advantages. Might she not share these, in a simple, objective manner, without compromising herself? She was giving to *life*, not to Simeon Erard, and they must be able to rise above the mean considerations involved.

Finally she wrote, deliberately: —

"My dear Mr. Erard: — I feel that I must have a share, even a very little share, in your work, in your ambitions and theories. Where I cannot hope to go, you may, perhaps, more easily through my help. So I have taken the liberty to place at your disposal, at the Messrs. Munro, a draft to be used in 'going on.' Every six months that will be renewed. You see, my first venture succeeded, giving me a surplus which I wish to invest again. And I owe to you so much real interest in life that I feel I must show a little gratitude. You need not acknowledge this.

"Believe me, ever sincerely yours,

"Adela Anthon."

She had no sooner posted this note than she was impatient to receive a reply. Would he possibly refuse? She was amazed to find herself hoping that he would. If he accepted — and she had sent the note in all sincerity — there *would* be a bar to any other relation. This scruple was conventional, irrational, but she felt that she could not rise above it.

The next two days were full of preparations, and when on the day of departure, just as they were about to drive

to the station, the reply came, she waited until they were settled in their coupé to read it at leisure. It was above reproach, self-respecting and yet cordial. He did not make too much of her gift, nor did he belittle the kindness. He placed the whole matter in a simple, objective light, as she had wished. The gift was not to him, but to be used by him. The note closed with a paragraph on a new book he was sending her.

She had read the note at one breath; then leaning back with a sigh, she passed it out of the window to her uncle, who had come to see them off.

"We have changed places, uncle," she whispered, slyly. "When you are in America you can't be bothered with all this."

Sebastian Anthon's face expressed astonishment and in a moment merriment. The joke in the situation evidently made the deeper impression, but as the engine snorted, he whispered back, "Take care, you are exploding pretty fast!"

She watched him walk up the platform, laughing unrestrainedly, probably in appreciation of Mrs. Anthon's remarks when she discovered the event. Miss Anthon allowed her mother to get comfortably settled. Then, anxious to have the matter out of her mind, she said quietly, "Mother, I have offered Mr. Erard four hundred pounds a year to continue his work with, and he has accepted it."

If she had said that she had offered herself, Mrs. Anthon might have been less surprised.

"This comes of John's queer will," she moaned at

last. "You are going to support that fellow? It's disgraceful. You had better marry him, that wouldn't be any worse."

"Perhaps he wouldn't marry me. At any rate there will be no chance of that *now*," she explained soothingly. "Please don't let us make ourselves uncomfortable over it. If I happen to have a large income, why shouldn't I give it away as I like? You wouldn't have said anything if I had given it here and there to washerwomen or hospitals."

The subject occupied Mrs. Anthon's mind until it was banished by the irritation of the Italian customhouse. When she got back to it, the next day, she comforted herself with the reflection that, God willing, this unmanageable daughter should be married before Erard reappeared on her horizon.

The six nomadic months that followed were a queer jumble of hotels and people and "points of interest." Miss Anthon said to herself during the three months of vagrancy in Italy: 'Patience, now! Some day a different *I* will return to understand and possess.'

In the same manner of passive sufferance she endured for another three months the little vaudeville of the various spas, which was played over and over each day with a sameness that rasped the nerves. She grew accustomed to the trim gardens with the glaring contrast between hot gravel and metallic green lawn, the stereotyped idle men and overfed women, the endless tinkle of hotel bands, and the hours spent with her maid con-

triving how to make the most of her tall, individual self.

The sultry weeks as they wore on gradually sapped her energy, even her desire to rebel. The reading suggested by Erard, which she had attacked at first with the fervour of a novice, seemed in the air and useless. Letters from Erard filled with details of his studies in Spain barely aroused her. She envied him the career, and was proud to have him deal with her as he would with a man, lecturing her on his hobbies, asking her help in verifying facts at Rome, or in judging delicate questions. "It is very hot," he wrote once casually, "but I manage to work early mornings and nights and lose little. Six weeks more will take me back to Paris." Then a month passed without letters, and, when he wrote next he mentioned briefly, "I have been ill, but I have my work nearly finished, and some sketches that aren't bad. Will you be in Paris to see them next winter?"

She carried on another correspondence, about her "business" as she was fond of calling her new investments. Wilbur "kept her posted" almost daily of the doings of the Water-Hoister and Improvement Co. Whole broadsides of newspapers came, filled with bombastic accounts of "the future of the arid lands." It seemed that Wilbur's invention could be turned to a number of purposes. "Through its instrumentality," solemnly concluded one Kansas City paragraphist, "we are about to open up an era in this country hitherto undreamed of, an era when the desolate plains of the

mighty Rockies shall flow with milk and honey, and the seat of the national capital shall be moved westward to the centre of a new civilization." The newspapers gave minute accounts of Wilbur's life from his earliest childhood, with accompanying photographs of him at every stage of development. He was pictured — in the *Omaha Hawk* — as a young man, musing profoundly on a desolate field, a black line in the far distance indicating water, and in one corner a small cut of the Hoister. Wilbur sent everything that appeared (marked with a broad blue pencil) to his "silent partner" as he called Miss Anthon. A "ten cent magazine" with a vast circulation published a profusely illustrated article on "The New American Inventor," with autobiographical notes at the head, containing information on Wilbur's personal habits, his hour of rising, the number of cups of coffee he indulged in, his temperance principles, etc., etc.

All this fuss and gossip seemed to amuse Wilbur, so far as he paid attention to it, yet he realized its serious side. Stock in the company continued to rise. Subsidiary companies for placer-mining in cañons and for fruit-raising on the reclaimed lands were being formed. Wilbur had already embarked on new schemes. In spite of his belief in the divine service of the Hoister, he was never imposed on by noise. At the very time when all was "booming merrily," he took part in a syndicate formed to buy forest lands in Alaska, and soberly recommended his partner to "join in the deal." He was about to make a short expedition to examine the ground (and also to look into some mines near Juneau), and if she

cabled him at once, he would sell part of her stock in the Hoister and place the proceeds in his new schemes. He had the prices of the various stocks which she owned, cabled her at the close of each week, and it added zest to the Sunday morning coffee to receive a little blue despatch, to know each week that she was richer than the week before.

Money gives power and freedom, she told herself again and again. It had freed Wilbur. Instead of spending his days as a small lawyer or clerk, he was striding on, growing each month in shrewdness, in experience, in grasp. Money had freed Erard, assured him the priceless leisure for tranquil, unharassed work. Would it free her? enrich her? cut through circumstances so that the restless, savage beast in her could grow and possess and be satisfied? Not yet, she reflected bitterly, and again the word must be *patience.*

CHAPTER X

October found the Anthons in Paris at a new Americanized hotel just off the Avenue de l'Opera. Mrs. Anthon talked of London, of taking a house for the winter, "where Walter could be at home." Miss Anthon threatened in that case to run off to Egypt with Molly Parker and a maid. They spent the brilliant days of the early fall in the usual round of shops and dressmakers, in company with the flight of tourists returning from their summer roosts in Europe, who were tarrying for feathers before swooping back to America.

Adela Anthon's curiosity to see Erard was gratified finally at a little "gathering" in his rooms. She had gone with Mrs. Ormiston Dexter and Molly Parker and had met Mrs. Warmister and the heavy Mr. Salters. They had praised Erard's sketches until the sallow little man gave the word to halt. While the others were drinking chocolate and listening to Salters, Miss Anthon went back to the bare studio with Erard.

His deferential attitude had piqued and irritated her. Couldn't he forget that she was his benefactress, see her merely as a woman and an attractive one? Even when she had him to herself his talk annoyed her. He expressed enthusiasm over her friend.

"It is marvellous how that Miss Parker, so untrained and unacquainted with even the *a b c*'s of Art, should

feel delicately and get hold instinctively of the right things to feel about. It puts us all to shame! She is a delicious companion, like a translucent lake in the heart of the mountains which reflects every passing image."

Miss Anthon looked at him ironically.

"Or, in other words, a kind of jelly that shakes when you poke it."

"Well, the great thing," Erard retorted, "is to have your sensorium delicate, impressionable, — educate it to be so, if you aren't like that young girl. How I should like to have her about always, to test impressions for me! I could put her before a picture or a piece of music, and — "

"Register the gush!" Miss Anthon mocked. "Tell me something more about Salters," she wrenched the conversation away from her friend. "He talks like a bundle of extracts from all the books you ought to have read."

"He's a stupid, rich young man. He steals all his ideas from me and mangles them too."

"He told me he was writing a book."

"Perhaps so! It takes only paper and ink to make a book."

Miss Anthon laughed. Erard was so sure in his judgments that he gave a companion a sense of fellow-superiority.

"And Mrs. Warmister?"

Erard's furtive eyes gleamed maliciously. "She wants badly to be wicked, but some remote, inherited scruple

keeps her to the letter of virtue. She catches a few ideas and phrases here and works them off over there. She would do anything for a sensation, for *réclame!*"

"Do you treat all of us in the same way?" Miss Anthon questioned awkwardly. "Use us and then sneer at us?"

"Do you put yourself in the same category with Salters and Mrs. Warmister?"

"But I don't remember to have heard you say anything civil of any one — except, possibly, Uncle Sebastian. And you always mention him with tolerant compassion." She was wondering, as she spoke, if this were an inevitable condition of the Napoleonic genius, to admit no worth except one's own.

"*You* surely need not complain." Erard lowered his voice deferentially. "Haven't I treated you as an equal? I have had it in mind to ask you to read the manuscript of my new book on the late Spanish renaissance."

"Oh, how I should like to!" she exclaimed enthusiastically, once more loyal to her admiration.

"And there are some manuscripts here in Paris in the National Library that you could work over for me, if Mrs. Anthon would permit." Her face lighted responsively. "You see, my dear Miss Anthon, that you can be of more service in our work than as a mere source of supplies."

She recognized a little sadly the evident tact of this stroke. He kept clear of all sentiment, apparently realizing that in accepting her money he had put himself beyond her social pale. She was now the liberal patroness, the *grande dame*, with whose private life he had

nothing to do. That was, of course, the right attitude for him to take, yet it irritated her. She broke into personalities again.

"What is the good of my doing all this, if I am to be hawked about Europe for a few months more and then carried back to America disgraced, shopworn, because I haven't been a large bait for the European market! It is all scraps, everything I do, and I am tired of it! A woman's life is like a garment pinned together—there is no whole piece in it."

"There is always marriage of one sort or another."

Miss Anthon looked at him contemptuously. Why didn't he make love to her, as he probably did to Miss Parker, to Mrs. Warmister? Was she too conventional? What ought she to do? Go to his studio accompanied only by a maid as this woman did, make herself nude of all proprieties, smoke and drink with him, and discuss the physiological aspects of passion and art? And yet if he should advance that way, she would snub him, taking pleasure in showing him that however much he might interest her, she despised his personal habits.

She rose abruptly and walked back to the salon where Salters was lecturing Mrs. Warmister and Miss Parker on some Japanese water-colours. Mrs. Warmister glanced up as they entered, measuring Miss Anthon swiftly with a disagreeable smile on her lips.

Miss Anthon, in chance intervals of leisure, accomplished some of the work on manuscripts that Erard had suggested. This occupation served as an excuse to bring

them together, and, in order to escape from Mrs. Anthon, they took long walks in parts of Paris she had not known before. Paris this autumn was to her altogether a new city, a strange, complex being with a human heart in rebellion with fate and law. It seemed to say, 'We *will* to be irresponsible, O God! We know not the morrow, *your* morrow, and we care not for it. Thou, God, hast given us a few poor nerves, some dying passions, and many evil fancies. With these we will play out your little game of dreams in our own manner, thus using up our vilely inadequate bodies.'

They roamed through the black alleys of Montmartre: she had the rebellion of the socialist. Beyond the Invalides lay the domain of artificial peace, of nuns and monks: she would settle the personal confusion of life by a perpetual, fixed idea. Nearer the river the old cathedral raised its towers, out of a past, lusty age into the trivial present. The little insects who manufactured petty art for this present world swarmed near by: she would join them and play at making an Apollo come forth from a *café-chantant*.

"No, no," she proclaimed to herself, "not marriage, but absorption in some effort. That will give freedom!"

Then she remembered Erard's remark, "There is no freedom, except the freedom to feel: the nerves must be watched, too, lest they fail."

And she had a sudden desire to abjure her master.

CHAPTER XI

On her return from one of these walks with Erard, Miss Anthon found at the hotel a large card, with the name John Foster Wilbur scrawled in an untidy hand. He had left word that he should return after dinner. She was surprised at his arrival. Had the Hoister Company "gone up," and had he come to break the news to her? Only this morning she had received the weekly bulletin of prosperity. Whatever brought him, she felt a thrill of unexpected pleasure in the thought of seeing him once more, and of listening to his convincing tale of life. He would be a relief, a refreshing vision of the concrete commonplace.

She dressed with unusual precision and care, — in a queer anxiety to make an impression on his inexperienced eyes. When he arrived punctually at eight, he gave her another surprise, for he appeared ten years older than when he was lounging about Paris a year ago. He was better dressed, though he had come in his travelling suit, as if in a hurry, on some business that did not permit forms. His square, brown face with its heavy nose wore an indomitable, convinced expression. Even his thick arm seemed to grip a possession when he shook her hand.

"How are you? Tired of Europe yet?" He drew

up a chair and sat down ungracefully, bending forward, his powerful hands bedded on his knees.

"Your card was a genuine surprise," she laughed back. "I had heard from you from Chicago only this morning."

"Yes, yes," he replied hastily. "I found I could squeeze out three weeks, a steamer sailed just so I could catch it, — the *St. Paul*, a fine boat, — and I packed my grip and came over."

This laconic account of his journey exhilarated her. She laughed again.

"Is there anything wrong with the company?"

"No! I guess not. I shouldn't be here if there was! Not that all your eggs or mine are in that basket now. We are settling down to a steady rush of business. You got all the papers and my letters. That blow in the papers was Jim Center's work. I got him a good place on the *Chicago Thunderer*, and he's done smart work for us. He's coming over here, by the way. He wants to go in for literature, the drama specially, and he's comfortably off now. No, things are all right over there."

He waited, as if blanks in the conversation might be as expressive as words. But Miss Anthon did not help him.

"You haven't forgotten our last talk in Paris?" he began afresh, twisting awkwardly to the side of his chair. "I said when stock reached one twenty-five, I should be back here with a new proposition. The first of the month the figure for the main company was

one twenty-six five eighths, — that's the day I started. I got a cable this morning, and it hasn't dropped since."

The woman felt her breath taken away, as if a hurricane had come booming into the room full of dead air, in which she was living. Her pulses began to beat rapidly.

"That must be very gratifying to you." Her words sounded to her needlessly flippant. They were like a blow in the face to a man who is taking a fence at one leap.

"Well, rather," Wilbur gathered himself together undaunted. "I am a pretty rich man for a fellow who got his chance hardly a year ago. I guess I can get what money I want before I die. I bought up nearly half a township, up where father lives, and gave it to him just before I started, and built him a nice brick house with a French roof, turned the old house into a barn. That was gratifying to me. But what I came four thousand miles to talk about, wasn't exactly this. You don't remember, perhaps, that I said I should have another scheme to propose when you saw me next. It's just this. Will you, will you," — his voice broke a moment. Then as if ashamed of his weakness he cleared his throat and said distinctly, — "Will you marry me?"

She had known that his proposal was coming for the past three minutes. It occurred to her that she might have headed it off, but instead she had sat nervelessly, almost anxious to have the shock. Now that it had come, she was at a loss how to take it.

"How can I tell? I haven't thought of it," she found herself stammering.

"I know," he replied disappointedly. "It didn't seem quite right to mention it in my letters. But you see we have worked along shoulder to shoulder, like real partners, through the first big crisis I have had. And I have learned to know you so well and trust you, if you haven't me. I feel that marriage would be a closer partnership, longer you know, and more intimate. Of course you are bigger as a woman than I am as a man, have broader interests, but I must get those too, and I can — with you. What I want first and most is *you*. We two can work together."

Then he stopped with unexpected tact, just as his attitude showed unexpected humility. He urged no more, but sat quietly while she thought with desperate swiftness. Of course her feeling about it ought to be spontaneous and instinctive, — novelists and poets made it out so in every case. She should be able to say yes or no on the spot. But the experience did not come to her in quite that way: she felt enormously drawn to the man, and more than ever from the form in which he had put his offer. A partnership, stronger and deeper in meaning than mere business, yet two-headed and two-working, with absolute trust and confidence on either side — wasn't that rational and ideal? And *that* would mean freedom. His every act indicated freedom, a large, hopeful way of life, full of plans and the realizing of plans by constant, swift, clever calculation. How much more vital *that*, than the dead groping into one's interior self

after expression or some faint representation of that inadequate self, — called art! It is better to live than to paint, some one said; it is best to make life your art.

Freedom! The very word had an impelling charm; freedom from this endless division of herself that present conditions imposed. How much Mrs. Anthon and Aix-les-Bains had to do with her decision it would be hard to say. For at last, as the still moments escaped while she faltered there before the intent man, all logical thoughts fled, and in their place came confused longings and impulses.

Wilbur rose and walked slowly over to the fireplace.

"If I should give you more time —" he began.

"No, no," she interrupted him, anxious to take herself at full tide, and feeling for him that delay would be a pain she need not inflict. "I think we know one another." She went up to him and frankly put her hand in his. "A partnership for life," she said slowly.

His eyes had a suspicion of mistiness in them as he answered earnestly: "God help me to make it prosperous for you."

Her face flushed. "And for you."

Then as he kissed her, drawing her head gently to him, a new train of feelings rushed over her; an intimation of other sides to this affair; of personal, emotional considerations she had never suspected. She looked at him wonderingly, amazed, uncertain. He kissed her again.

Mrs. Anthon appeared just then, quite breathless over the excitement of Wilbur's sudden arrival.

"Mother," Miss Anthon said quickly, "I have promised to marry Mr. Wilbur."

"Well," Mrs. Anthon gasped, "well, Ady, you might have done worse, and you have been so curious of late in your goings on I didn't know just how you would end." With that she relapsed into sentiment and tears over losing her only daughter.

"But, mamma," Miss Anthon interposed maliciously, "this is what you have been planning for months, plotting with Uncle Seb and Mrs. Dexter. You ought to have known your own mind."

"Whatever I have done, Adela," Mrs. Anthon summoned her dignity, "I have done it always for your true happiness; some day when you have a daughter, you will understand how many sacrifices a mother makes!"

Wilbur smiled emphatically; that sentiment was quite proper.

CHAPTER XII

In spite of the preoccupations incident to the season, Miss Anthon found an opportunity of seeing Erard. She preferred to tell him of her new step rather than write a letter; for her curiosity about his opinion on the subject was quite keen. They were examining an Ingres at the Louvre and Erard was engaged in convincing her of its regular merits. In her present mood the smooth, polished surface of the nude figures struck her as vacant and useless. Imaginatively she began to see that all art was of the same nature as this Ingres, — a little dead.

"I have taken your advice," she remarked casually, "and chosen the active life. I am to marry — Mr. Wilbur."

"Ah!" Erard exclaimed, recovering his balance neatly. "You will be the Chicago matron after all. And what shall I do for an assistant? I had just taught you a few things: you were beginning to be useful!"

"That was mere play, you know well enough. I could never be more than an intelligent clerk." She was disappointed that his manner was so completely impersonal. He took it altogether as too trivial a matter, too much of course. After a few minutes he returned to the subject.

"May I paint you, Miss Anthon, as *La grande dame de Chicago, U. S. A.* I should like to make you a wedding gift, and perhaps, if Mr. Wilbur doesn't object, it might be in this form."

"You may ask him," she replied shortly, silly pique rising at his insolent calmness. She evidently meant very little to him, personally. He was quite right; but to please her, he ought to be wrong. Even his interest in lecturing to her about pictures seemed to flag; making some conventional excuse he cut short the visit to the Louvre. It was as if he regarded time spent on her now as wasted — it would lead to nothing. As they parted he arranged for sittings, and then remarked, —

"You will be very happy of course, after you have shaken into place and got used to yourself. The commonplace thing is the best for most of us."

"Yes, I shall be very happy," she replied shortly, turning away.

With scarcely less curiosity she waited for her uncle's comment on the news. It came promptly, and if brief and rather conventional, was kindly. One sentence stung her. "So you have given up exploding and decided to be a good girl."

She flung the note down irritably. "I believe he would have liked it better if I had told him I was going to marry Erard." She felt that the old man was bored, if not disappointed, in finding that all her rebellion had come to this decorous end.

Walter Anthon wrote their mother at great length. The substance of his remarks was the relief which they

must all feel that Adela, if she had not done the brilliant thing, at least had ended safely and properly; if it *were safe*, that is if Wilbur were really sound financially, and that, he supposed his mother and uncle had taken pains to find out. Beyond that he was sorry that her life was inevitably to be so divided from his. "We shall be country cousins," she explained to Wilbur, "and he hopes that we shall not put him in the awkward position of ever visiting London."

Wilbur left for Chicago, after a week in Paris. The portrait came off while the Anthons were waiting for the trousseau. The sittings were full of ennui to the subject, for Mrs. Anthon insisted defiantly on attending every one. She persisted in regarding this portrait as an instalment of Erard's debt to the Anthons, although her daughter explained elaborately that it was an act of mere friendship. While he painted, Erard talked merrily of the coming life in Chicago, advising and exhorting her on matters of taste.

"Of course you will build a house — a palace I should say. Do induce Mr. Wilbur to have a good architect, if there is one to be had over there. Bad architecture has such a subtle influence for deterioration on the person, and bad architecture has been the order of the day pretty generally in your new home. Tell Mr. Wilbur that he will distinguish himself in the best way by putting up a house that is more than 'elegant,' and 'big,' and 'costly.'"

"We may live in a hotel for a time," Miss Anthon answered shortly.

Erard lifted his eyebrows deprecatingly and dropped his glass. "No, you mustn't live in a hotel — an American hotel above all! — it is so degenerating. I haven't painted the portrait with that view."

"Why? Would you have made me into a kind of barmaid, or grass-widow?"

"I should have sprinkled in diamonds a little more freely."

Another time he continued the same vein. "Of course you will have the furnishing and all that on your hands. Do have Lemerre design the chairs. I will write him myself, if you want me to. He is rather dear: you couldn't have him do the whole place at once — that would take a duke's fortune. But get a little at a time, one or two chairs and a table. You can't think how much good you will do your neighbours, when they come to call or to dine. And the stuffs, — there is only one place for good colours — Maron. You ought to have some artist design the whole for you at the same time. When you come to pictures, that will be *so* difficult. Do, dear Miss Anthon, go slow. Don't let Mr. Wilbur buy old masters, because there aren't any, or 'way beyond a millionaire's purse. You could start in with some good etchings and old engravings. Then I could get you a Degas for a thousand pounds, an early Degas. It is a great find, I assure you, and one Degas would go a great way towards furnishing your house."

"One of those women in a bath-tub!" Mrs. Anthon ejaculated.

"Whatever you do, my dear Miss Anthon," Erard con-

tinued tranquilly, "go slow. Get one good thing at a time, and make your house a shrine for that."

Miss Anthon felt as if she were being tutored for some missionary service. About to go forth to the wilderness, she was receiving the last advice of the father superior.

"Of course you will be coming over here frequently to get your ideas straightened out, and to fortify your tastes. Six months there will make you provincial."

Occasionally this note of condescension stung her. "Of course we shall travel a great deal." Her conception of the future was large. She and her husband were to take their life, which happened to be for the immediate present in a western metropolis, and mould it in an original and free pattern. The years of great things were just ahead.

She had refused to look at the picture until it should be in nearly final shape. One afternoon, towards the end of their stay in Paris, she took Molly Parker with her for a first view. Erard was in, when they arrived, standing idly before the picture, which he had brought out into the centre of the empty studio. He was smoking a cigarette, in a mincing manner, his hands in his pockets. The two women sank into the chairs he placed for them.

Erard had insisted upon painting her in a white satin evening dress, half reclining upon a crimson divan as though tired by the fatigue of receiving. It was undoubtedly a clever piece of work, painted knowingly and for the world successfully. He had made the most of her tall form, her ability to carry clothes. He had turned her indefinably from a girl to a woman; her physique

seemed a bit more robust and solid than actually true; her face, a trifle full and less mobile. In expression she wore a half-smile, looking down at the roses which drooped from her hot hand. Yet it was not the expression of one altogether pleased with herself, in spite of the smile, which seemed to be caused by some pleasant flattery that still hung in her mind.

After the first long look, Miss Anthon glanced reproachfully at Erard.

"You haven't painted *me*."

"Wait five years," he emitted shortly, dangling the cigarette from his lips.

"I didn't expect to have your prophecy."

Erard shrugged his shoulders.

"I paint what *I* see."

"And shall I be like that? Dissatisfied and bored and a little heavy?"

"You will know some facts, then. Now you are fooling."

Miss Anthon would have liked, impulsively, to seize a brush and paint out the face, which would grow to have the power of a sneer at her present self. But she was restrained by the presence of Molly Parker.

"A stunning piece of work," Miss Parker remarked, eyeing the portrait intently.

"*La grande dame de Chicago, U. S. A.*," Erard assented softly.

"But I shouldn't hang it except in the attic," Miss Parker continued. "Ask Mr. Wilbur if he wants it around."

Erard smiled as if sure on that point. What Chicago magnate would not like to show off that superb, commanding person? "Will you let me exhibit it?"

"Certainly," Miss Anthon replied coolly, drawing on her gloves. "It can make no difference to me."

But it had made a difference to her already.

"So these are your real views of my marriage!" she exclaimed, as Miss Parker wandered off to the old spinet.

Erard's amused glance said, "Well, yes! if you want to know."

Her former ambitions tantalized her; this cynical, absurd little man tantalized her. Was she selling herself cheap? Was Erard stronger and finer than she?

"Good-by." She turned away with a last look at the picture. They shook hands. She seemed to be making her farewell to a few mad dreams.

On the drive back she maintained a moody silence. The past month since her engagement, life had seemed free and simple and full of interests. Her equanimity had comforted her and assured her that she was making no mistake. Now the horizon contracted again, and she wondered whether she had broken the traces that galled her, or only shifted them for a time.

"Marriage ought not to be such a mystery!" she exclaimed at last.

"You ought to feel sure enough," Miss Parker replied encouragingly. "All the money you want and a good fellow whom you took of your own free will."

"There *is* no reason to expect mistakes, Molly, and

almost every girl feels the same way, I suppose, when she is engaged. But the smashes come, all the same."

Miss Parker looked at her curiously.

"I wonder if you really love him! You always look at your marriage from the personal point of view, as a kind of happy solution to a difficult problem. You don't seem to see *him*," she continued, in a far-away tone. "And I believe something always tells a woman when she is justified in taking her chances. Of course she may have a hard time, but if she is the right sort, and that something comes into her heart, why! all the after tragedies don't matter. For you everything seems serene, and yet you haven't that something, I feel. You don't really love him now."

"How dare you say that!" Miss Anthon exclaimed harshly.

Molly Parker looked as if she dared say anything. To be obliged to give her reasons was another matter.

"Oh! you take life, marriage, your career — 'broadly,' as you say, like a thorough course in self-development. Perhaps you will carry it through that way. But if I hadn't that *something* in my heart which would make me go barefoot with a man and have a good time, I would run away. If I were married to a man without that something, I should stick a hat-pin into him, or make his life a little hell, no matter how good he was. But you may be different. 'Love with you may be an affair of growth.'" Her voice dwelt mockingly on this last sentence. Miss Anthon drew herself up proudly, with the air of having been guilty of familiarities with an

87250

inferior. They drove on some minutes in silence. Then Miss Anthon said sombrely.

"There is this life, and I *will* make the most of it."

They were crossing the Place de la Concorde in the early lamp-light of a November evening. The splendid lines of light in every direction flashed on the slippery, damp pavements; carriages were dashing from the Rue de Rivoli across the Place into the broad avenue leading to the dominant arch. The individual hum of Paris, that Paris she had so much loved and wondered at, the Paris that had aroused slumbering instincts and had mocked at her, surged through her brain:—yes, there was much to grasp in this life!

"And there are other things," Miss Parker murmured, "which we cannot manage always. We can only dream and hope, for after all life may be too great for you and break you."

PART II

CHAPTER I

CHICAGO is an instance of a successful, contemptuous disregard of nature by man. Other great cities have been called gradually into existence about some fine opportunity suggested by nature, at the junction of fertile valleys, or on a loving bend of a broad river, or in the inner recesses of a sea-harbour, where nature has pointed out, as it were, a spot favourable for life and growth. In the case of Chicago, man has decided to make for himself a city for his artificial necessities in defiance of every indifference displayed by nature. Along the level floor of sand and gravel cast up by the mighty lake, the city has swelled and pushed, like a pool of quicksilver, which, poured out on a flat plate, is ever undulating and altering its borders, as it eats its way further into the desert expanse. Railroad lines, like strands of a huge spider's web, run across the continent in all directions, wilfully, strenuously centring in this waste spot, the swampy corner of a great lake. Through these manifold strands, the city touches the world.

The soil, where it emerges from the swamp, will grow nothing but spindling, scrubby trees and weeds. Man must make all,—must prepare special foundations for

his great buildings; must superimpose good streets of asphalt or brick upon the treacherous bottom; must make green things live, with the cares of a hot-house, to delight his eye, for left to herself nature merely hides the plain with a kind of brown scab. Upon this desolate waste first necessities have been provided for by miles and miles of nondescript buildings, enclosures for business and the requirements of naked existence; and then, these last years, time has come for ornamentation and individual care, — for the private house, the boulevard, the park. This last development, however, is sporadic; hence as a whole the first impression Chicago gives is that of a huge garment made of heterogeneous materials, — here a square of faded cotton, next door a patch let in of fine silk. For the order of life is first existence, then comfort, then luxury, and last — when the human mind begins to suffer ennui — a little beauty for a plaything.

The complex quality of this wonderful city is best seen as the stranger shoots across the prairie in a railroad train, penetrating layer after layer of the folds. First in the great distance, rises a pall of dull smoke, shifting lethargically up and down the scene, as the lake wind or the land wind pulls and tugs at its mephitic dead body. Then the railroad, describing irregular curves, crosses lines of streets built up on embankments with oily ditches below, and intersected by cross streets that disappear into the marsh. In the chinks of the broken, ambitious plank walks grow brown weeds and grass. At regular intervals lamp posts set high up on mounds indicate where the city will place

some day a solid level for actual, busy life. Here and there rows of frame boxes, or cheaply ornamented cottages crop up, or a stone-front apartment building stands stranded, above the swamp, its foundation stones on a level with the lamp posts or the broken plank walk that gives access to its desolate self. Sometimes these tentative buildings lie closely together, and there are stores and saloons, and the streets are penetrated by electric wires. This is the Chicago of the future, — perhaps of the morrow, whenever the advancing lines of blocks shall have bounded that way.

Then come the solid outworks of the great city, which are marked roughly by the parks flanking the three landward sides. These parks are a noble patronage of nature, an indulgence to the carnal appetites of men, which are given to green things, as trees and flowering bushes and soft sod. They are great slices of man's territory handed over to the landscape gardener to be made into nature by a *tour de force*. Here begin the broad boulevards where live the men of the city who lead the toil and fight in the furnace, and have emerged to build great comfortable new houses surrounded by broad edgings of cool-looking grass. If one has succeeded fairly, there beyond, under the pall of black smoke, one comes out here to rest and enjoy and possess.

Still there is left the city, becoming hotter and fiercer mile by mile. Life spins there; man there is handling existence as you knead bread in a pan. The city is made of man; that is the last word to say of it. Brazen, unequal, like all man's works, it stands a stupendous

piece of blasphemy against nature. Once within its circle, the heart must forget that the earth is beautiful. "Go to," man boasts, "our fathers lived in the fear of nature; *we* will build a city where men and women in their passions shall be the beginning and end. Man is enough for man."

And out lakeward hangs the cool wind, ready now and then to rush into the thousands of streets and avenues that intersect the city like the pipes of a boiler, to clean out the stale air and the filth, willing thus to assist man in his slipshod management of his home. At other times it is busy with the lake — that marvellous lake! — spread out beyond the sandy shores, shifting, changing, gathering light to itself, playing out the panorama of nature close at hand for the unheeding benefit of this creature, man.

To John Wilbur, Chicago was like a congenial Alpine air, which stimulated his appetites. From the very first the strife for advancement summoned all his virility, and the sense of rapid success exhilarated him. His wife, on the other hand, remembered for many a day the sudden depression which the fierce city had given her spirits that first March morning of their arrival. It seemed to her imaginative mind the first *fact* she had ever known. But she learned to accept the conditions passably, and to do without many sensibilities; she learned how to make business — the mechanics of life — serve for all interests of mind. Nearly two years passed thus in a swift leap while Mrs. Wilbur was becoming a "worker," before Molly Parker came to visit her. Mrs. Ormiston Dexter having died suddenly, Molly was pre-

paring wonderingly to earn her bread, and for such vague purposes Chicago offered a good field.

The first morning after her arrival the two visited the Wilburs' new house that was going up some miles to the south. They drove out by the arrow-like Michigan Boulevard, then turned back and forth, skilfully dodging bad streets where pools of slime lay in the broken wooden pavements, crossing the whirring cable-tracks, until they reached a broad avenue. Here the houses were separated by patches of lawn or vacant lots, and the expansive boulevard was divided in two by little artificial mounds of earth, with trees and shrubs, in which wound gravelled walks.

"We decided to build 'way south," Mrs. Wilbur explained, "because it isn't so dreadfully noisy and dusty out here. We can have plenty of room, and, just think! there are two or three fair-sized trees on our lot."

Miss Parker was eagerly looking here and there. The morning breeze from the lake shot little spots of bright colour over her face.

"There!" Mrs. Wilbur pointed with the whip down the misty avenue. "You can just see it."

"What? That enormous white building?" Molly exclaimed. Mrs. Wilbur touched the horse with her whip nervously.

"John felt that the house should be more than merely a home to live in: it is to be a good solid investment and a sort of advertisement of success. It helps him as a young capitalist to have it known that he is building a great house. Then the architect got us in for

more than we expected. You see it is built all around with stone, very solid, and gives a more colossal appearance than its size really justifies."

Miss Parker looked at the neighbouring houses that Mrs. Wilbur had pointed to for comparison. Most of them were only faced with stone. She had noticed, also, that in one case where a house was going up, the imposing front consisted merely of a thin veneer of stone placed over masonry.

"How do you like the architecture?" the mistress asked nervously.

"It is so imposing," faltered Molly, "and what is the house in the rear?"

"Oh, that's the stable. We had to finish that first, so that it could be used for the materials."

"It looks like a mansion itself."

Mrs. Wilbur led the way into the new "marble palace," as it was locally described. She showed her friend about, with sudden alternations of enthusiasm and listlessness, explaining in detail the suites of rooms, the manifold conveniences suggested by the architect. Suddenly she exclaimed, —

"You have had enough of this! I am tired of it too. We come out here two or three times a week and every Sunday. I will drive you out to the parks, and we can have a good talk."

Miss Parker remarked timidly, when they were once more in the trap, jogging southwards on the hard boulevard, "You must be so awfully rich!"

Her friend smiled. "Yes. John has done remarkably

well, and my money helped of course. But the house is really beyond us. That is the temptation out here, to discount the future, or at least to live up to the present to the last cent. And for the past six months the times have been *so* bad." She looked grave.

"Don't you find it all interesting and exciting, now you are married, — planning, and all that?"

"Oh, yes!" The married woman took the offered lead eagerly. "It has been such a full time. You see, I know almost all John's business, and he has taken me with him on all his business trips, once to Alaska even, and I have felt like a real partner. I have managed some affairs here in the city all by myself."

She talked rapidly, describing a few energetic and capable women in Chicago who managed large businesses. "It is so good to feel that you have a hand on the reins; aren't merely driven along in a brougham, while you read a novel."

"You must like it." Miss Parker warmed sympathetically on finding a spot of enthusiasm. "Chicago and business must be so much more real than all that stuff in Paris."

"I *have* liked it," Mrs. Wilbur's face sobered again, "while it was venture and struggle, and I had a hand in it. But, I should *hate* anything that came in between me and my husband, and just this active, free life." Some passionate chord had been stirred.

"A woman loves and marries and has a large scheme to carry out. She plans living with her husband as an equal, and then —" She touched the horse quickly.

"What?" the girl asked curiously.

"Then she finds that their roads *must* divide. She must 'make the home,' cultivate persons whom it is well to know; even entertain horrid, stupid people because her husband's interests are involved."

"But if they are *your* interests too?"

"A woman wouldn't sacrifice herself to get her ends in that way. Now we have this house, I must try to be something of a 'leader,' so John thinks, and go in for reading papers, or at least for music and art, because the others do. I must entertain, become a 'patroness' if I can, and all the rest of it."

"I should think it great fun to have a swell house, and loads of people about, and put my name down for all the nice charities. I'd have a beautiful time and fill that big temple of yours full of interesting people."

Mrs. Wilbur smiled indulgently. "Interesting people —I mean people interesting for more than a few minutes to any one but themselves — aren't so easy to find, my dear, anywhere in this wide world."

Molly Parker did not answer. That had not been her experience. Every object that she could remember, from the puppy dogs and the babies in the streets to the self-conscious New England professors at Aunt Dexter's, had always amused her.

"Then there are other facts a woman doesn't reckon with before she is married, — her children," Mrs. Wilbur continued abruptly. "Molly, do you think a woman is horrid because she doesn't want children?"

"Yes," the younger woman answered promptly. "Per-

haps not at first while she is kind of honeymooning it, but afterwards — why, of course."

"I suppose that is the proper way to look at it," Mrs. Wilbur assented regretfully. "If a woman doesn't love her husband, children are interests, and if she does love him, she wants his children. But it isn't true necessarily. Like so many other proper conceptions, it may be a commonplace lie."

Miss Parker opened her eyes in consternation, wider and wider. "Well, your husband wants children; every man who is good and nice does."

"I don't," Mrs. Wilbur answered passionately.

"Don't say that, dear." Molly Parker gave a little shiver of superstitious horror.

"It is what two women out of every three say or think, if they have any spirit in them," Mrs. Wilbur exclaimed excitedly.

"John has been in the Dakotas two weeks to-day, and I haven't been with him because — in a few months I shall be a mother. Next week he will be here again for a little while and then off for another week in Boston and New York. And it would make no difference, if he were here all the time, like most business men, I should be put aside, — *hors de combat.* It will be a whole year, perhaps two, before I can be his companion again, before I can have any life of my own. I am tied to a circumstance that may be misery, that means two years gone, out of the twenty good ones of life. Not to speak of the *others* that may come!"

"Why did you marry, then?"

"What has that to do with it?" she said impatiently, "a woman doesn't marry for children; a young woman doesn't think much about it beforehand. When she does think, she supposes what the world says is true: it all arranges itself, and is a blessing, and a great happiness. The world has been dealing in sentimental lies so long that its axioms are apt to be foolish. No! there is no freedom for women: they are marked incapable from their birth and are supported by men for some obvious and necessary services. Between times they have a few indifferent joys dealt out to them."

They had driven slowly around the great oval of sward in the green park, and crossing eastward towards the lake were passing the grey walls of the new university, which rose boldly against the steel-blue sky.

"You must sympathize with *them*." Miss Parker pointed dubiously to a group of women students who were crossing the campus.

Mrs. Wilbur made no reply and they drove on silently towards the lake. "Oh! how good it is, that great lake," Molly exclaimed as if eager to escape from some shocking ideas. "How I love it, the colour is so pure, and the little clouds out on the horizon are like little hopes of happiness."

She jumped out of the carriage and stood looking into the lake, as if she would grasp it in her arms, her black dress swaying in the air, and her cheeks flushing with excitement. Mrs. Wilbur watched her a little enviously.

"Now let us talk about your plans," Mrs. Wilbur be-

gan when they had turned back towards the city. "You are not marrying, with all your proper views."

"No! Twenty-four last March. Five proposals in full form, three half proposals, — kind of suggestions, — four other things that might have come to something, but didn't. There is hope still. I am looking hard for him, and when the right young man comes along, I won't hesitate. Have you any likely young men in view?"

Mrs. Wilbur shook her head. "That is one thing Chicago hasn't produced, — ideal young men with good fortunes suitable for ideal young women without fortunes. There's Thornton Jennings, but he hasn't any money. He is quite the nicest young man I know."

"Then I must do something right off quick," Molly Parker sighed, disliking doing anything definite as much as a discreet cat.

"What *will* you do?" Mrs. Wilbur asked thoughtfully.

"Teach kindergarten, I guess. I get on best with the kids. But tell me something about Chicago and the people. How did you come to know them?"

That was a long theme which occupied the two friends for the rest of the drive. Mrs. Wilbur explained how much her uncle Sebastian Anthon had helped them to get a start socially through some old friends, who were warmly devoted to him. And in Chicago one got to know enough people very soon. There was a certain social openness, and a willingness to take people for their personal value. Then John had proved unusually *sympatico*, had made friends easily.

She described the three sections of the city with their three distinct *milieus*. When the city was young, people settled away from the lake out of a superstition that the water was unhealthy, — "some miles in the interior where it is very hot, and where it is awful everyway. Some day I will take you over there and show you the miles of shabby homes, that bear all over them the marks of not being in it." Then she related "the pilgrimage of the successful." These good people of the West Side, prospered in business, and desiring something more than narrow, high-stooped brick houses with black-walnut decorations, moved down to the lake; most, the very rich, to the south where land was to be had in plenty. Occasionally a family who had acute social aspirations moved again to the north into the little segment of lake shore. This northern settlement held itself as conservative and distinctly fashionable. "But the money is where we are, on the South Side — for the most part."

Mrs. Wilbur recounted ironically, yet with genuine interest, their own experiences in Chicago. They aspired to "the society of progressive people of weight and wealth, who patronize art and music and education." They were members of the Art Association, of the Society for the Support of Classical Music, and a dozen minor enterprises of a public-spirited nature. Then Mrs. Wilbur described the Woman's Amalgamated Institute and the Monday Club, to which she had been recently elected.

"You see," she concluded with a laugh, "the women foster the arts and sciences. We are making it all:

we order a stock of ideas as you would get flowers from a florist. Next Monday I am to read my first paper, — on Modern French Art. You must come and hear me get off what Erard told us over there."

"And Erard?" Molly Parker put in curiously.

"He is bringing out a book, I believe. He sent me the proof, but John had no interest in it, and I was too tired after the day's hurly-burly to do more than glance over it. The picture, they say, was a great success in the Champ de Mars and at Berlin. It's on its way over now."

"I think," Miss Parker remarked irrelevantly, "that when we are landed in one place, the rest of the world should sink out of sight, — so there need be no pillars of salt along the road."

"Chicago is just the place for you then," Mrs. Wilbur answered wistfully, looking down the miles of Michigan Avenue. "When you are in it, you are cut off by a vacuum, as it were, from the surrounding world. You can't see outside, and you hear the voices of the others only faintly."

"That sounds too much like a prison to be true."

Mrs. Wilbur's face looked as if she were convinced that it was a prison, in certain aspects at least.

CHAPTER II

Miss Parker decided soon that if Chicago were a prison, it was a very nice kind of prison to visit. Mrs. Wilbur's friends did all manner of pleasant things to entertain her. Each one seemed to feel responsible for the good name of Chicago hospitality, and if the people were a little eager to hear nice things about their home, Miss Parker was amply able to satisfy them.

On the appointed Monday afternoon the two friends sallied forth for the meeting of the Monday Club. Molly Parker watched with amusement the flutter of excitement with which Mrs. Wilbur clutched her little package of manuscript, when, on entering the room, they met the subdued hum of feminine voices on earnest purposes bent. The first paper was on Flaubert, by an important "social light" (as Mrs. Wilbur whispered to her companion), and a great worker for the cause of woman as distinguished from women. Molly Parker knew nothing about Flaubert beyond the fact that he had written at least one naughty book. The paper was not written to inform, but to entertain and impress. There were mysterious sentences about psychology and social movements. Suddenly it was all over. Much talking among the rows of women ensued; the president — a little delicate-faced lady — called for criticism and remarks from the floor. A few ladies berated poor Flaubert roundly

and took exception to some of the opinions in the paper, as "being dangerously subversive of the home." There seemed to be a general delicacy about speaking improprieties even about an improper book. So the president called for Mrs. Wilbur's paper — On Some Tendencies among the Impressionists.

Mrs. Wilbur's paper was earnest, enthusiastic, a trifle schoolgirly in its sounding periods. It caused much more discussion than poor Flaubert. Many of the women had seen the impressionists in Europe, and some owned Pisarros and Monets, and had "views." Molly Parker found herself in a stirring atmosphere of art criticism. Then tea followed; women came up to congratulate Mrs. Wilbur and to meet her friend. Molly was charmed by their cordiality, their unpretentious good-sense and power.

"Why, it's great!" she exclaimed later, as they drove back, "to find all these fashionable women in such stunning clothes taking up these serious interests."

"They have a lot more, — music, charities, civic advancement; and they are really better in practical affairs. It's not much good discussing Flaubert or the impressionists without a background, as Mr. Erard would say, and though these bright women read whatever they are told the world is taking seriously, and have seen pictures and often buy them, it is really *funny* to hear the talk. That's not their proper atmosphere: you can't supply background, cultivation, and insight, by any ready-made process of education, evening lectures, and so on."

Molly Parker was eager to combat this ever present

note of depreciation and dissatisfaction. "You expect wonders. They know a deal more than I with all the ministers and lawyers in my family. The proper values — the expression — will come fast enough to the next generation."

"It's always that," Mrs. Wilbur replied scornfully. "That blessed next generation! May I live to see it! But it requires a pretty lively imagination to be always living in the next generation!"

"I like this one." Molly settled herself comfortably in the carriage.

She found, however, that Mrs. Wilbur in spite of her lugubrious reflections, was a fairly contented person and ever active. The days sped by in engagements. Mrs. Wilbur organized with the organizers; met with committees of the Civic Association and the Art Association, — dined and entertained and gossiped, as if no world existed beyond the misty miles of Lake Michigan. She took Miss Parker to luncheons, literary, social, and feminine, — and skilfully engineered her into the interest of influential people.

Wilbur had come back from the Dakotas and was off again, first to New York, then to Springfield, and again to New York. Miss Parker found him better looking than in the Paris days. He was cordial to her, but the chief impression he gave was one of great preoccupation. Mrs. Wilbur explained this by remarking that the times were difficult.

During one of these absences, Mrs. Wilbur and her friend attended an open meeting of a literary club. It

took place in the ballroom of a large house and was attended by a great many society people. The paper of the evening on Walt Whitman was given by an elderly gentleman, a retired "capitalist," who cultivated letters. He didn't like Walt Whitman, and he made a number of jokes which seemed to touch responsive chords in the audience. The occasion was less serious than the Monday Club, but "more brilliant," and enlivened by the presence of men. After the paper — which was discreetly short — the two friends found themselves among strangers in one corner of the large room. Presently a young man passed by, and catching sight of Mrs. Wilbur came up to them. Mrs. Wilbur's face lit with unusual animation as she turned to Molly Parker.

"*This* is Mr. Jennings. He can tell you all about the Civic Association — he's one of the secretaries — and about the municipal scandals."

Miss Parker glanced up at the young man's face. He seemed to stand unusually erect, with a kind of military uprightness, rarely met with in our civilian society. His high forehead was rendered more conspicuous by the receding line of hair. His green eyes were moist and large and played a part in the mobility of his face. Molly Parker smiled back in response to his smile. Something sympathetic seemed to pass quickly between them as they stood looking at one another.

"He's trying to make the city over," Mrs. Wilbur continued.

"No," the young fellow interjected, "only working my own broom as vigorously as I can. And I wanted to

see you particularly, Mrs. Wilbur, about this franchise business. You must get Mr. Wilbur to join us in fighting it. For a wonder the papers are dead with us, and if we can only get the decent men interested, we can prevent this rascally steal."

Mrs. Wilbur's face grew solemn, as if she were remembering something unpleasant. Jennings went on explanatorily to Miss Parker. "You've seen it in the papers? The railroad companies have made a raid on the legislature, to get a lot of privileges for nothing. Wrightington — he's the scamp that owns the mayor and the city council — thinks the legislature cheaper on the whole than the council, and that makes the affair much more serious for all of us." He talked on easily of the situation which was then uppermost in public gossip. It was a gigantic steal, a fraud on the public to be perpetuated for half a century. The newspapers had been violent over it: unfortunately the opposition had centred chiefly about a demagogic young city politician, who was using the uproar against Wrightington for personal capital.

"Mr. Wilbur says the newspapers have overdone it, that the measure isn't really so bad for the city, and only fair to the railroad corporations," Mrs. Wilbur suggested. Jennings looked at her sharply for a moment, and then answered swiftly, —

"But Wrightington's methods? If it were a bill to found hospitals, his means of getting it through are enough to blacken it."

"Well, you *have* to do that, they say, to buy your way here," Mrs. Wilbur added sadly, a flush mounting over her face.

"That is the devil's argument that we are always meeting," Jennings replied earnestly, looking at Mrs. Wilbur intently. Then people came up, and the conversation ended. Miss Parker found herself talking to a handsome young man with a keen face. When he had gone Mrs. Wilbur said lightly, "You wouldn't catch *him* talking as Jennings did. He used to be a secretary in the Civic Association until he got all the notoriety out of it he could. He is a type out here. Some years ago he was a clerk behind the counter in Arnold's; now you find him everywhere. And they say he will marry the rich Miss McGregor. He is the 'bound to rise' kind, and he never does anything that will hurt his chances. Watch him!"

There were many others — middle-aged and young men, "each with a story," Mrs. Wilbur declared, "if you only knew it."

"But your Thornton Jennings is the best," Molly Parker concluded, as they talked the people over after their return, "and I hope you will get John to be on his side."

Mrs. Wilbur's face darkened. "That question is so complicated, and like so many things here, opinion seems to come down to two views — that of those 'who are in it,' and that of those who aren't. But Jennings is a fine fellow. I met him on the steamer coming home. He turned up here that winter as a young lawyer. John calls him 'my stripling.'"

"Well, I like your stripling, and I think he will be somebody."

"Or leave us."

CHAPTER III

THE glamour of the "partnership" plan of marriage was fading away in Adela Wilbur's mind. She had found money-getting exciting enough, while it was a matter of large chances in which she took part. Now that she was forced to accept the usual interests of women, she tried to invest her new home, her clubs and acquaintances, with importance. This form of excitement, however, was not what she had planned. And her husband seemed to be getting away from her rapidly. The Water-Hoister Company was a thing of the past. Two bad seasons in Kansas and Nebraska had crippled the concern. Wilbur had insisted on "getting out" in due season. The first division between them had come over his plan of selling their large holdings, with the idea of buying in later on a low market. To her this familiar device was like a sneaky trading of your home. Their partnership was based upon faith in the idea of the Water-Hoister. To step out and let other people bear the burden of its hard days was, if not dishonesty, cowardice. Wilbur's sagacity, however, had been proved convincingly. Hoister stock fell steadily, until now it was kicked about for purely speculative purposes.

What Wilbur had done with the sums realized from their Hoister stock, she knew only vaguely. He was so much in the thick of the fight that she could not follow his rapid movements. She inferred that he was one of a group of young capitalists, of whom the newspapers asserted Wrightington was the master-mind.

The great Wrightington! This name hawked about ever since she had known anything of Chicago, filled her with a kind of terror. He was an unscrupulous adventurer, who had "gone broke" several times, yet was always triumphant; a man received nowhere, of no respectable affiliations, yet a power to be followed. Many of the respectable element secretly admired his audacity, half excused his reputation, and covertly followed his lead. He was brazen, impudent, cynical, and inevitable. Of late the papers had been frantic over Wrightington; they teemed with the usual charges of scandalous corruption and bribery which his transactions periodically aroused. Wilbur had shown unusual irritation, when his wife had approached the subject of the protest before the legislature by the Civic Association.

"Don't mix us up in that tomfoolery," he had blurted out. "Your nice people are keeping quiet to escape the mud the papers are throwing, but you will see fast enough what side they are on six months hence."

Mrs. Wilbur was confused by these words, and unable to ravel out this question complicated by prejudices. She tried to put it out of her mind, to believe that her husband was right: "it was not a matter for amateurs." But every morning the question stared her in the face

in the columns of the newspapers, and was dinned in her ears even in the gossip of the women's clubs. She could not escape a perpetual query: "What has John to do with it?"

Little things, quickly noted and interpreted, indicated to her that he had much to do with this "deal," and a few days brought greater certainty. The Sunday following her talk with her husband, they had visited their new house, which was now nearly ready for the decorators. On their return Wilbur proposed that they should call on the Remsens, who were to be near neighbours. There they met Mr. and Mrs. Israel Tracey, also neighbours in the Chicago sense. Presently Mrs. Stevans, an important and wealthy widow, came in with a young broker (who was also a "society man"), named Wren. The men drawing to one side of the large library fell to talking confidentially among themselves. Mrs. Wilbur listened apprehensively to the earnest tones. Israel Tracey, a short, squat, powerfully built man of fifty, was speaking his mind freely to a sympathetic audience.

"The papers are all humbug. Squires in the *Courant* is down on it because Wrightington froze him out once years ago. He hasn't said a word in his paper about the omnibus electric ordinance, which was a sight more shady. He had a hand in *that* pie. The papers are all rotten; it's straight blackmail and intimidation." His face puffed out redly.

"It's a shame, the way the papers lead people by the nose," Wren put in.

"There was a time," Remsen, who was heavily inter-

ested in real estate, began sententiously, "when every one howled for anything in Chicago. You wouldn't see a word of blame in the papers no matter what people might think. Nothing was too good to say about the city. It was the best place on earth to live and die in. Now if the papers keep this racket up, people will be afraid to put a dollar in the place. They're just ruining it, damning everything and every one so. They've gone pious all of a sudden."

"But you wouldn't have them approve of Wrightington." Mrs. Wilbur ventured into the conversation impulsively. There was a moment of silence in the room, as if some one had awkwardly spilled a glass of water. Wilbur looked annoyed.

"Well," Tracey began again, defiantly, "Wrightington is a mighty clever man. This franchise business is misrepresented. He needs it to protect his properties and — "

"What's more, he'll get it, too, in one way or another." Wren laughed at his own cynicism. "All this howling may make the price higher, but he's bound to get it."

"The bill passed the Senate yesterday," Remsen explained. "There's only the governor now."

Wren laughed. The other men smiled and tacitly abandoned the topic. Just then, as Mrs. Wilbur turned back to the women, feeling reproved, she caught a look of intelligence which passed between Mrs. Tracey and Mrs. Stevans. The latter, who had taken no part in the talk, was smiling knowingly across to Mrs. Tracey. Mrs. Wilbur saw her lips moving in an inaudible whis-

per. She seemed to hear the words, "Did you have something in it?" And she noted Mrs. Tracey's smile and affirmative nod. The pantomime was over in five seconds, but it gave her a vivid shock.

All these people were gambling on the chances of Wrightington's having successfully bought the legislature and the governor. Perhaps the franchise was just enough, but to speculate on the chances of bribery struck Mrs. Wilbur as peculiarly sordid. She had a revulsion of feeling different in the case of each one. Little Wren, with his moth-eaten baldness, his fat, pudgy nose, and bleared eyelids, seemed like a pander. The newpapers had it, she remembered, that he had spent most of the winter in Springfield as one of Wrightington's agents. His hands were really soiled with dirty money. And Mrs. Stevans, the ample Mrs. Stevans, of capacious bosom and highly coloured reputation! The champagne for her dinners came in this way. The Traceys were another kind: they had risen straight from the lumber-camp. One could hardly resent the expression of näive, peasant cunning on Mrs. Tracey's hard little face. Twenty years ago, when she haggled with the company's agent over tobacco and pork, that expression began to grow. And the Remsens — well, she liked them and respected them, yet it was commonly said that Remsen's extra two millions came from a "tip" on the sugar schedule of the Wilson bill.

Her disgust was not excessively moral. To be sure, old John Anthon had taught her that the laws of commercial morality were none other than those of private up-

rightness. Yet the disgust she felt was more than moral; it was a loathing of the sordid, of the brutal, of the vulgar. Had she, Adela Anthon, with her high-strung ideals of man's life, her wide-sweeping ambitions, come to be a party in such an affair? Had she exchanged her love of intellectual life, her longing for beauty, to share in a common swindle on the public, brought about by a dicker between a knave and a gang of venal country legislators?

She rose abruptly and escaped. On the drive home, Wilbur did not speak. He seemed disgusted with her, yet tolerant in consideration for her condition. At last she asked bitterly, "So we belong to that crew?"

"I thought you were a bigger woman, Adela, than to talk like that. If you mean, that I have put every dollar I could raise into traction stocks, yes, — three months ago. But it isn't good for you to talk over such matters; it only disturbs you."

Yet when she was silent, he felt forced to continue. "I believe that the companies should get this franchise; all the noise over it is absurd. As for the corruption charges, they're always made. Probably there's been plenty of grease used in this matter. But we *have* to do it, here, and that's all there is about it."

"And suppose you lose? Suppose the governor is an honest man and vetoes the bill?"

Wilbur laughed. "You don't suppose I'd have three hundred thousand in it if I didn't know which way the governor is going to jump. He came high, but — well, *Wrightington is nervy.* You will see that he will play

it out well; the governor'll hold off, and have a hearing, and go through all the forms. But he'll *sign*."

Mrs. Wilbur gave a quick gasp. Wilbur put his arm about her. "You are nervous, Adela. You wouldn't be so freaky over this business if you were all right. And, Ady, it means the house. If this goes through, the house is all right, but we were getting into a bad way."

This argument hardly appeased her. So their home was to represent this transaction. She could never cross the threshold without feeling that Wrightington had given it to them; it was a morsel of Wrightington's plunder.

"And there are plenty of men in Chicago who have taken the same chances! The Ralstons, and the Browns, and the Heckers are mighty stuck on themselves. But what with false assessments, and contributions to the city council, watered industrials, and tips on sugar, I guess they needn't boast."

"Don't you think there are *any* honest men in this city?"

"A great many, from my point of view. Not so many from yours. A woman *can't* understand it. Business is like life: you've got to play as the others do and play *hard* all the time, or you'll be chucked out. You can't be dainty."

She knew that this opinion was final. He was not a bad man, he was not corrupt; he was merely heartily of his times, and her scruples were unintelligible to him. He was the same Wilbur that had convinced her in Paris of the desirability of action. He had developed, and she

had caught sight of his claws. That was all. So she gave up the contest, as he lit a cigar and lowered the carriage window. The frosty air hung in clouds about the eaves of the houses, and the hard roadbed of the boulevard gave a chill thud to the horses' hoofs, while they rolled swiftly through this city of men.

Was marriage altogether like a partnership?

CHAPTER IV

THE hearing before the governor at Springfield came off as Wilbur had predicted. The papers reported that Charles Bishop Wren, together with Israel Tracey and Wrightington, had gone on to the capital to plead for the bill. Also Thornton Jennings, chairman of a sub-committee of the Civic Association, appeared before his excellency, as the sole representative of the opposition. Public opinion was exhausted, or submissive: the matter seemed already arranged.

"You see," Wilbur explained to his wife, "no one of any account has taken the pains to appear before the governor against the bill."

"Perhaps they prefer to save their fares," she retorted. He made no reply, and she was afraid to trust herself further. Yet she listened eagerly to Jennings, who happened in one afternoon, while he described his experiences at Springfield.

"The 'hearing' was a regular love-feast between old Wrightington and his excellency, the governor, who was moderately full. They sat on me every time I opened my mouth." He laughed good-humouredly, stretching out his long figure. "At last the governor suggested that I should hand in a brief of my case. He had had enough of 'chin.' It was a delicious farce."

"He signed, then?" Mrs. Wilbur asked nervously.

"Not yet. But of course it is all settled. I knew that when I went on."

She looked at him admiringly. He continued idly. "I wanted to be in at the death. It was worth it too, as a comedy." He laughed again contagiously. "I met old Parsons of our firm on the train. He gave me some fatherly advice about sticking to business, and keeping out of 'politics.' He cited a model — Jack Hendricks — you know him? The slim, white, perfectly clean young man who is trying to marry Remsen's youngest. Honest-policy Jack we call him at the office. He is a nice young man."

His mind ran on nervously, and when he spoke again he seemed to be looking into the future. "But the good people of Chicago are running things on a wrong basis, and some day they will wake up with forty-thousand Polacks and other impetuous citizens tearing down their houses."

"I shouldn't be altogether sorry!" Mrs. Wilbur flamed out.

"Well, if there were only Wrightingtons and Traceys and such like. But the others — *you?* After all there would be merely a row, some shooting, and back again to the old game of grab."

She reflected after he had gone that Wren had called him a socialist, a meddler. "They think he should be a clergyman!" She was glad that he left before her husband should come in and find her with her "eastern puppy, the young agitator." She did not wish to have

any extra prejudices to contend with. For her feeling was high: — she must express herself somehow, must struggle to draw herself and her husband out of this situation. Wilbur found her walking nervously back and forth, crushing in her hot hands the evening paper with its "story" of the hearing.

Mrs. Wilbur was too excited to use any finesse. She outlined her plan rapidly: — they must sell the investments made with her money, and use that for the new house. In this way she thought to induce her husband to drop the traction stocks. For, she concluded, "then our home won't always be a sore between us."

Wilbur looked at her disgustedly. "That's the woman in business! I don't care to let go my hold in the Alaska company, nor in the other things. As far as your conscience is concerned, — well, I have already made eighty thousand in this deal. What would you like me to do with that?"

He spoke coolly, almost good-naturedly, but with contempt. Mrs. Wilbur rose quickly and walked up and down the room, speaking passionately.

"Do! Let us get rid of it all and keep just what I had from my father and leave this place, this prison. We can go to Europe and live quietly and decently and think of *other things*. If this goes on, we shall be like the others, like the Traceys, all of them, ploughing the mud for swill. This isn't life, — this is — "

Pausing for the word, she caught herself, and grew calm again. Her fury, which had made her speak out for once, appeared childish, ineffective. Her desire was

the old, womanish desire — to run away from the present, to elude the tangle.

Wilbur looked at her in astonishment. Then as if recollecting that allowances should be made for her, he spoke again calmly.

"Well, you wouldn't like that kind of thing long. I shouldn't, I can tell you. That isn't life, doing nothing but just dawdling around and being respectable. You're all twisted up and nervous, Ada, and the best thing is for us not to talk business until you are better. Then you'll feel differently."

She looked over at him critically. He certainly would never "feel differently." He stood alert, keenly alive, self-reliant, quite assured, — one who had fitted into fate admirably. Her passion for business, for the stir and contest of affairs, ended there, that night. The papers were torn, the partnership dissolved.

Her excessive feeling was unreasonable, she knew, yet this episode of the traction stocks had revealed to her all the ugliness of this game with money, which as a girl she had fancied to be fine and exciting. Others possibly might play it with ideal justice, but so few, so very few! And the worst of it was that your ideas of fair play became warped insensibly, that the best of men acquired a contempt for the "amateurishness" and "quixotry" of their youth. They became Jesuits with their souls. And the end of it all after you had got the success was one or all of three things: personal indulgence, charity, or a vague kind of comfort in the general development of mankind. Money made Chicago expand

until men became dizzy contemplating where the end might be. But what use in all this multiplication, if it meant no gain in quality, no finer fibre, no higher life of the mind or of the soul? If the hard, honest Remsen were but to give place to the unctuous Wren? Why go on sowing a vast country, planting dollars and reaping millions; multiplying railroads and factories and mines, — when all that came of it was an immense commissariat business for the accumulating hordes of greedy, half-educated, wholly common people? One passionate, intolerant moment killed this woman's love of business energy, — the mere exercise of getting wealth. It was a curious trade, — that was all.

Her imagination made her unfair, narrow. She could not see that in this wholesale indictment of an eager, fresh civilization, she was condemning the order of nature. She did not pause to consider the sturdy men who kept to their ideals, nor realize that the seething, hungry mass who fought for the only glory they knew were pitiable and blind. She would have none of it.

Six weeks later Mrs. Wilbur's son came. When she had grown strong enough for her old life, she put all business aside methodically, turning away from the stock quotations in the newspapers in nervous dread, and skilfully avoiding any reference to their affairs whenever Wilbur showed himself inclined to talk business. There had been a time when she resented her child's interference with her plans, his division between her and her husband. Now she welcomed it, trying to make up to the little Sebastian her disloyalty during the

months before his birth. Even Molly Parker, who presided over a small kindergarten in the neighbourhood, found her a sufficiently solicitous mother.

When Thornton Jennings wondered why Mrs. Wilbur had lost her interest in the Legal Aid Society and in the committees of the Civic Association, Miss Parker explained blithely, "She has other things to think of."

"I don't believe it is that, altogether. She was not the kind to lose all interest in this fashion."

"Perhaps she is passing through a crisis. She is always having a crisis on hand."

And Wilbur — who found nothing to complain of in his handsome, composed wife — also wondered about the crisis. He found himself left completely to his own devices. He did not bother himself long, for the business world was beginning to shake off the lethargy of the past two years, and he was busy with success. At odd moments, the husband and wife talked of the new house. It was nearly ready now for occupancy, and there was an undiscussed plan to move late in the summer.

Mrs. Anthon, who had come from St. Louis to assist in this operation, was anxious that the house should be properly dedicated by some important social event. Wilbur agreed with her, and the two discussed the matter for weeks. At last Mrs. Wilbur showed enough interest to suggest, languidly, giving a musicale. "Then," she added, "we might have a series of lectures on art subjects by Mr. Erard. The Woman's Amalgamated Institute have asked me to get him for the club, and I might offer the house."

Mrs. Anthon sniffed dubiously. "I thought you had dropped that fellow by this time. What's he doing over here?"

"Visiting and lecturing, I believe. He will be in Chicago by the end of October. I had thought of asking him to stay with us while he is here. What do you say, John, to having him?"

"I kind of think as your mother does. What's the use of bothering with him any longer? He is either on his legs by this time or ought to be."

He asked, as a second thought, "Have you been sending him money right along?"

"Oh, yes," she replied in her usual calm tones. "But I won't have him here if it troubles you. The lectures will be for women in the mornings, you know."

"Oh! if he interests you, — I thought we had been travelling different roads these last years —"

"Yes." Mrs. Wilbur's tone was slightly ironical. "We have been going different ways, but I still find him — interesting; perhaps more than — well, most things."

CHAPTER V

THE night of the musicale Erard arrived at the Wilbur's very late. He had driven from his hotel, after a comfortable dinner and a cigar, without taking the trouble to ascertain the distance. When he entered the hall, he could hear the music from an inner room, — a bit from a new Russian symphony, more intricate than melodious. Through the doors opening broadly into the hall, he could see the people, the women seated in irregular bunches fanning themselves and furtively looking about, to inventory the guests and the rooms. As he continued to peep, he was surprised at the brilliancy of the dress. He had vaguely fancied the inhabitants as costumed in something between the conventional blanket of the frontier and the plush absurdities of our grandmothers. Yet these women, many of them so portly that they could carry magnificence, appeared more richly dressed than anything he remembered in London or Paris.

The men were standing about the doors in various uncomfortable attitudes, seemingly unhabituated to this difficult part of the full-dress parade. Erard noticed, as he glanced about, that they were generally middle-aged, solid men, with here and there a bony, wiry specimen. To his European eye, the faces appeared individual, yet curiously undistinguished; "rudimentary types," he

murmured. Every one was silent and serious, as if living up to the decorum of the occasion.

One of the footmen, who had taken his coat and hat, followed him and motioned to a room on the right, away from the music. Erard took the hint, thinking to find a chair where he might make himself comfortable until the music arrived at an intermission. He found himself in a dimly lighted room, which had evidently been planned for a library. He perceived indifferently half-a-dozen other occupants of the room. As his eyes began to wander about, he saw Mrs. Wilbur, who was watching him from the other end. The first thing he noticed about her was the dress: he had painted something like that once, with its delightful folds of white lace and cream-coloured satin. And the face, too, he had painted that. Mrs. Wilbur caught his eyes, and they looked for an instant at each other, examining. Then he noticed Mrs. Anthon, planted firmly in another corner of the room. She seemed a bit dumpier than three years before, and more complex in dress.

The music ceased with an awakening bang. A servant turned on the electric lights. Erard crossed the room to greet his hostess.

"Where is the original?" he asked meaningly. "I wish to compare it with — the portrait."

Mrs. Wilbur flushed with annoyance.

"So it is! the great red divan and the same dress and the house. I couldn't have arranged it more expressly for you! The portrait is in here," she turned to an inner room, designed for her den, and touched an electric

knob. Erard looked at his hostess critically, while she threw herself, wilfully, into the pose.

"Not quite," he announced, glancing at the portrait that faced them, "not the final thing. Perhaps another year or two. The stone is harder than I thought, and perhaps you have complicated the problem."

Mrs. Wilbur refrained from pushing him to an explanation.

"And you have changed also: prosperity has altered *you*."

"Yes, we take less tragedy in our portions as we go on. The pinnacle doesn't seem quite so distinguished, nor the abyss so awful, as it did once. It is the middle light of life."

"And your work? the painting?" she suggested eagerly.

"I paint less," he replied uneasily. "Each season I mean to get at it again, but the penalty of success in one effort is that you are expected to repeat yourself. I am repeating myself."

"Oh, you *mustn't* do that," she replied pleadingly, understanding that he referred to the success of his writing. She would have carried protest further, but Mrs. Anthon intervened with a tardy guest who had been hunting for her hostess.

"Ady, here is Mrs. Stevans. She's been looking for you. Why are you hid off here? You mustn't flirt in the corners when you have friends to look after."

Mrs. Stevans was one of the most distinguished guests; Mrs. Wilbur introduced Erard to her.

"*The* Mr. Erard?" Mrs. Stevans beamed at him from the entrenchment of her broad, uncovered shoulders and bosom. He looked positively dapper and slim in comparison. "You are coming to tell us all about pictures."

"Not so bad as that," Erard protested.

"Why, it's the Mr. Erard who painted your picture, Ady!" Mrs. Anthon exclaimed.

"You must meet some of *them* and talk with them," Mrs. Wilbur said quickly, to extricate him, and she led the group back to the large rooms.

"I shall have you to dinner, and you must tell me all about my naughty friend, Mrs. Warmister," Mrs. Stevans shot at Erard as he moved away. Then he found himself navigated about, presented to this important person and that. The men received him with grave *empressement*. They took it for granted that "he was a leading light in his line," and though they were not familiar with that line, they were propitious to any prophet who had achieved success in it. In a remote corner Erard bumped against Mr. Sebastian Anthon.

"So you're back in America at last." The old man greeted him cordially, holding out a thin, trembling hand. "For long?"

"A few months," Erard replied patronizingly; "to get an idea what it is like. A vacation, you know, after my book."

"Ah, yes," the old man murmured thoughtfully. "It's mostly books now, isn't it? instead of pictures."

"Criticism absorbs me the more I think," Erard admitted.

"A pity, it's a pity, you know. Talk doesn't amount to much — in the end — all the talk in the world. I have a nephew over there in London — Walter, a pretty boy. He does a lot of talking, clever boy. But the thing, the main thing, is to feel." He looked at Erard as if from a distance, examining his shambling form and thin face to see whether this fellow had it in him to feel.

Suddenly the music began once more, a fugue resurrected from some German manuscript and given to the modern world for the first time by the able young conductor. Erard took the opportunity to slide away from Sebastian Anthon. He seemed to hear as an accompaniment to the grave fugue the old man repeating, "A pity, it's a pity!" Soon he was beyond his tormentor, very near to the booming music. Mrs. Wilbur had arranged the musical part of the evening, he concluded; she had shown positive genius in knowing what would impress the public and make her "function" remembered through the season. And the credentials of every selection were printed out on a little programme.

Then came the food and drink, to which the guests devoted themselves assiduously, earnestly, with what seemed to Erard an enormous reserve force. Wilbur had looked out for the supper, and he also had calculated well. In the billiard-room, where the men left their wraps, were liquors and cigars, towards which from time to time the younger males disappeared. This private-bar, in addition to the profuse champagne served publicly, aroused Erard's curiosity.

He tiptoed about, sniffing the new atmosphere. He came across Molly Parker seated in a recess of the hall, enjoying equally her ice and a sleepy, affable young man who was telling a long story. She looked very attractive in a black gown, with long black gloves; the sombre colour deepened the fairness of her skin and emphasized the great eyes that were falling out in her excitement over the story and the ice. She reached Erard her left hand, in a casual fashion.

"Don't disturb yourself, Mr. Wren," she said sweetly to the flabby companion. "It's only the new Parisian genius Mrs. Wilbur has imported, Mr. Simeon Erard. He won't spend more than two minutes on me, if he does that."

The young man rose pompously.

"Happy to meet you, Mr. *E*rard, — E*rard*, is it? And how do you find Chicago?"

"Very good place as long as it likes him," Miss Parker interposed maliciously. "We will give you a lot of new sensations," she went on, "but they won't always be pleasant."

"There are some very fine things here in your line, I believe," the old young man continued ponderously.

At that moment Thornton Jennings appeared. Miss Parker promptly introduced him to Erard. The younger man towered commandingly over Erard's head, while they shook hands without words, as if measuring one another, and recognizing the valour that each possessed. At last Jennings spoke, with a comprehensive, winning smile on his face.

"I am glad to have had this chance. I read your articles in the *Beaux Arts*, and I have your new book. I have heard of you through a lot of people over there. And there is another link between us," he added less spontaneously, "your brother has told me such a lot about your plans, and your father — "

But Erard received these cordialities with a stony impassivity. He was not in a mood to be reminded of his antecedents. Miss Parker had been right in saying that all his sensations in Chicago would not be pleasant ones.

At last the crowded rooms began to thin out. Supper disposed of, conversation did not have sufficient excitements to hold one after midnight with a prospective drive of perhaps six or eight miles. Erard stood in the hall, one of the last to say good-night.

"They are so nice," he remarked to his hostess, "especially the ladies; they seem like such good mothers, so homely and unpretentious. I want to sit right down with them, and talk over Mary and Jack, and the new bay-window, and the clergyman riding a bicycle."

"You had better not assume too much," his hostess laughed. "You will find that they can talk over the last salon, the new book on Rembrandt, even your own articles. Don't think you have measured their horizon quite so easily."

"Well, I hope they won't open up often by asking me which is the 'sacred' and which the 'profane' love in Titian's picture, as one young woman did to-night," Erard replied sulkily. "I had rather talk babies."

"Have a cigar or something, Erard?" Wilbur asked,

weary of this prolonged tête-à-tête, and willing to patronize the young man of talent who had no great house, no good champagne, no successful feasts to give. Said young man of talent could come and admire the other kind of talent that owned houses, horses, and champagne, and now and then, if he were discreet in his views, he might be called upon for dinner to enliven a party of lethargic good folk.

Erard looked at Wilbur coolly, as if weighing the chances of being bored against the comforts of a cigar and a glass of hot whiskey.

"No, thanks," he concluded indifferently. "I think I shall walk back some thousand blocks to the hotel. I must be off to arrive before breakfast."

The family party lingered in the library while Wilbur finished his cigar. Mrs. Wilbur flung herself wearily against the wall on the long, red divan where she had been seated when Erard entered. If he had seen her now with her restless hands roaming over the large bunch of drooping roses, her eyes tired, not with physical exhaustion, but with the perpetual play of half-thoughts that sap vitality like dreams, the languor of the face at the time of triumph, he would not have said, — "Wait two years."

"Well," Wilbur broke the silence as his wife offered no remark, "I think our racket was an A 1 success. The house looked fine. The music was unusual, and the food was stunning."

"Yes," his wife assented. "They seemed to enjoy themselves."

"Old Bailey and Fernald were here with their wives. I didn't expect that," he reflected complacently. "But the judge didn't come. Mrs. Linton was here, and that married daughter of hers. The judge didn't come, though!"

"Judge Linton's rheumatism confines him to the house," Mrs. Wilbur replied comfortingly.

"Did you notice Mrs. Stevans's diamonds? She is a fine-looking, well-set-up woman. I had a long talk with her. She may be a little gay, but she has a first-rate head. She was asking about the Bad Lands Company."

Sebastian Anthon sat near the fire smoking a long cigarette, a habit he had maintained in spite of the brick interests, and eyeing Wilbur keenly.

"I suppose," he spoke languidly, "this is the top of the hill. You are pretty young to have got there already. You'll have to spend the rest of your life trying not to roll off."

"It's a big success, Ady. I am proud of you." Mrs. Anthon crossed the room and kissed her daughter effusively. "You have done everything just as I would have had you do, — married well, and had a family" — here she prophesied, except for little Sebastian, unless he could be called a "family," — "and have this elegant house, and — "

"Let me show you your room, uncle!" Mrs. Wilbur followed the old man, who seemed to be fleeing from the volubility of his sister-in-law.

"It's so large I lose myself," he explained as his niece put her arm under his. "What do you do when you want

to be at home and not in a hotel? Well, Adela, I didn't think the explosion would end in this!"

She looked at him wistfully. "Nor I, Uncle Seb!"

"Not that it isn't quite what you should do. But it doesn't seem to suit you. Most things don't suit in this world, Adela. We are a lot of misfits, a lot of misfits."

She put her arms around his neck affectionately. "You should have married me, Uncle Seb! We would have exploded together."

"Yes, that would have been fun. How splendid you are!" he exclaimed wearily as she turned on the electric lights in his suite of rooms. "Do you think of water-hoister and brick stock and Bad Lands and all your other investments when you lie in those beds?" He noticed her sad eyes, and added, "You are splendid too, little girl."

"No. I see Wrightington on the walls."

"Who the devil is Wrightington?"

But she had hastily left the room. When she returned to the library, Mrs. Anthon went yawningly to her chamber, leaving husband and wife alone. Suddenly Mrs. Wilbur asked him, "Are you content with it?"

"Why, of course. Who would have thought four years ago in Paris that we should be sitting here!" He continued rather fatuously on the theme of their success. He was thirty-three, and he had done better than very well. To be sure, he had had his wife's little capital as well as his own push in the Hoister Company, and he always paid full recognition to her share in their fortune. To-night he had demonstrated publicly what he

could do. As he finished his cigar and rose to put out the lights, he observed casually, —

"Adela, I thought you toted that Erard round a good deal. Why can't you let him do his own pushing? If he were a first-rate gun, a Whistler or a Sargent, or what is that fellow Mrs. Stevans had, Raf — Raffelly — it would be worth while. But we can't shove *him* on our shoulders all the time. And I think you ought to drop supporting him. It would not be a very fine thing to have known around."

The last remark revealed one of Wilbur's new social anxieties which were puzzling to his wife.

"It is a curious convention," she observed bitterly, "that a woman may be intimate with her husband's friends, but must not even pretend to know her own unless the husband has indorsed them. The four hundred pounds I have paid to Erard's bankers has always come from my private fortune."

"If you put it on that ground," Wilbur answered airily, and then indulgently, "you have always had your own way, and if you don't mind the false position — "

Mrs. Wilbur looked at him. Men like Wilbur, endowed with the best intentions and the invaluable qualities which perpetuate a democracy, should know when to refrain in handling women.

"This talk about Mr. Erard is — too vulgar. I shall ask him to luncheon here to-morrow to arrange for his lectures. And I will find an opportunity to withdraw my — my assistance in his work."

She turned away into the hall. The house was all

dark now save for the glimmer of a gas-jet in the lower hall. The warm air, scented by the profuse hot-house flowers, made a peculiar odour that permeated even to the bedchambers. The place seemed tomb-like in its dark expanse of vacant rooms. The suggestion of the tomb made the mistress smile grimly: a tomb that had to be carried on and lived in by the ghosts of the living. And what made the gates of this modern tomb so intangible, so strong to enclose? Nothing, yet everything.

CHAPTER VI

MEANWHILE Erard, in company with Molly Parker, whom he had offered to escort around the corner, had gained the silent boulevard. The arc-lights cast circular patches of bluish white on the gravel walks and the frosty lawns before the big houses. The line of electric lamps extended, like a citified milky way, into the indefinite distance of the metropolis, which slept now for a few minutes. Above hung the soft edges of the smoke-pall.

"Ugh!" shivered Erard. "It is beastly empty, this never-ending city of yours. Down one of these straight perpetual streets one might expect to be chased by an army of ghosts. If I saw a man in the distance —"

"You needn't be afraid," his companion interrupted lightly. "To be sure, there are a good many 'hold-ups' on the streets. A man was almost killed on that corner a month ago, and all he had was seventy-five cents. But if any one comes, I will scream, and you can run to the nearest house for assistance."

Suddenly Miss Parker whisked around the corner of a vacant lot into a cross street as desolate as it was lonely. The defective boarding of the rotting plank walk necessitated gingerly progress.

"This new cosmopolis has been in such a hurry that it has neglected to make its toilette," Erard remarked.

"I wish that you hadn't come to Chicago!" Miss Parker flamed out.

"Why! I am a most perfervid admirer of all I have seen except the lonely stretches in the streets and the holes in the sidewalks."

"You are only amusing yourself and getting material for a bundle of epigrams. You haven't any sympathy or understanding. I hate to see you using your eye-glass on the people who made all this and are making it!"

"Am I so lost?" Erard replied with an amused laugh.

"You people in art and lovers of new ideas really talk a lot of nonsense. I have heard enough of it to know. But here we are. Thank you for your escort, and good-night."

Erard turned back to the boulevard. Plunging his hands into his pockets and tying the hood of his cape over his head, he prepared for a long tramp through the silent city. On, on he sauntered, at the loitering pace of a Parisian, past the huge isolated houses with tidy front walks of patented concrete, each block squared artificially to resemble stone, but carrying somewhere the tell-tale firm-mark in brass; past the narrow wedges of high apartment houses, faced with pretentious stone and finished in the frank homeliness of unburnt brick, with scaffolded ends looming barrack-like in the alleys; past the rows of low brick stores, built out like booths from the old line of retiring wood-cottages. This section of compromise between business and home was most disfiguring of all in its ragged expression. Erard felt relieved when

the square fronts of the business blocks began to loom up in the fog and smoke of the lower city. Here an enormous windowless wall of an armoury; next door the thin sides of a carriage factory; further on the spidery lines of a hotel. Thus for two miles until the sky-scrapers towered in the chill fog.

"Superb, superb," he murmured to himself. "I must have walked five miles, and not a building, not a dog-hutch, where there is an idea expressed beyond size, convenience, and either the possession of money or the desire for it. It is a new race, a new world."

It had roused his curiosity, this Chicago, from the first peep he had had on the train of the roaring city. Miss Parker was quite wrong in imagining him hostile to the place or its people. He was wondering over them perpetually, as a man would wonder who is enabled by a powerful lens to take into his consciousness a new planet where he finds that his ideas of propriety have been entirely reversed. Such a novel discovery could cause in *him* neither pain nor pleasure. If some one should come along the shore of this new world and bellow at him that he was beholding the last utterance of creation, he would laugh good-humouredly at the newcomer's provinciality.

What a pother they made, these women especially, over duties and enjoyments! His certainties were hard and sure, thank God! An exquisite curve, a subtle mixture of colour in a landscape, the power expressed in a moulded limb, or the richness of a flesh tint — that sent *his* blood rushing a little faster, gave him a fuller

sense of actual existence. He sneered at all transcendental or religious interpretation of these pleasures. He was willing to place his delight in the woman of paint along with the delights that a merely sensual and gross man might find in the same woman. His were more delicate, more lingering sensations — that was all. In the same way he was willing to grant the business man his sphere — let him be a gourmand of action; or the religious man, his emotion over the fate of the world. But beyond the sensation — whatever it might be — *nothing*. Only stupid, crude people or hypocrites pretended there was a beyond.

And so Adela Wilbur gave him no romantic excitement. She was an interesting combination of nerves. Possibly she would find out, after trying life all round, that her greatest vitality came through cultivating her æsthetic sensorium. If she did, he could be of help to her. That such a discovery at this point might produce a smash, some turmoil in the affections and relationships of life, did not concern him. This was a jarring world, — one must expect to dodge boulders, — but to consider the boulders, even when they were so-called duties and affections, that was stupid. It was a pity that she hadn't found out earlier what was best for her, that she should go blundering about with her fine powers. Four years ago he had thought her too raw; had, indeed, advised her to do just what she had done — and possibly found tedious. If she should seek his opinion again, however, he should tell her to start once more, with her eyes open.

Erard was not without the male satisfaction in bearing rule over women. Other men, he reflected, would have exulted at the thought of her beautiful self, at the mystery of her restless face, — but he was tranquil over mere flesh and blood. He preferred to own her mind, rather than her person. The delight of binding her will, of leading her across the laws of convention, of conquering *her*, was keener to him than any vulgar emotion of possession.

His revery was disturbed by the night-clerk in the hotel, who handed him his key, with a confidential leer.

"You've made a night of it, sir."

"Now," Erard mused, "*her* crowd have the same ideas as this smart young fellow. They suspect I want to run away with Mrs. Wilbur in a buggy. That was what the little Parker wanted to say to me."

"There's a young fellow been hanging around here for you most of the night," the clerk continued. "He was over there by the window."

Erard turned sharply, scowling. But the young man had gone. As he entered the elevator, he muttered.

"But it is about time to close money matters with *her*."

The next day at luncheon Erard had a better opportunity to study Mrs. Wilbur. Sebastian Anthon, who was developing the irritability of age, had held that there was no peace in Chicago, and hearing that Erard was expected for luncheon he had slipped away home. Mrs. Anthon had remained at Field's absorbed in shopping. So the two were left to themselves.

Erard was delighted with this morning view of Mrs. Wilbur, — her serious face alert, her rich dark dress fitting close to the white neck and curling hair. She gave him a charming sensation of being a woman, neither a girl nor a case in social psychology. He would like to paint her again as she sat, her luncheon untouched, eagerly outlining her scheme for the lectures. He also appreciated the capable manner in which she treated the social and financial sides of the affair.

After luncheon, she took him into her private library. The portrait, he noticed, had been removed. When the lecture-course had been settled, Mrs. Wilbur led the talk to his work.

"Of course," she remarked abruptly, "I understood your plans only generally when we talked about them in Paris. But I have been thinking a lot about your painting less. It has made me sad. Almost like losing one of my own faculties."

Erard hastened to extenuate his course, and ended lightly. "You have stood by me four years almost. Now I think I can go it alone, as you would say over here."

Mrs. Wilbur, remembering with a start her promise to her husband, felt relieved, yet protested until Erard explained that his writings brought him a small income. He did not state that the amount thus received was not large enough to keep him in cigarettes and note-paper. She was grateful to him for having saved them both from an unpleasant topic, which must have left sordid reflections.

"And your book," Mrs. Wilbur continued. "It was impossible over here to follow you closely. One grows so rusty in a few months, not seeing things to train the eye. Then the importance of a new Liberale or Mazo seems less vital here than one might expect."

That led them on into a long talk, in which Mrs. Wilbur betrayed with less and less restraint her irritation with her environment, her disgust with "drawing-room art," and with democratic ideals and joys. Erard amused himself by gaily defending her old aspirations. "You should go in for immense charities, civic organizations, education — and the rest of the housekeeping for the 'people.' We over there," he tweaked his head in the direction of Lake Michigan, "are nearly played out. They will either smash all the good buildings, or pull them down piecemeal in the process of 'restoring'; the pictures will be gone in another hundred years — there's almost nothing that is original paint now left on the old masters. Sculpture will be locked up safely in museums for archæologists. And Science — that refuge for the commonplace mind — will reign supreme in a mighty democracy. Science will then go forth with its tin dinner-pail, the emblem of equality, not annoyed by the twaddle of sentimentalists like you and me. Decidedly, you should get in line with your times."

"Don't sneer at me, please. I could make every sacrifice — almost — for something beautiful. One great valley, all green at its feet, with a barrier of hills in the clouds and snow, or just one peaceful old English

field with a lot of trees. Or a sight of that — this is so silly!" She felt as if tears stood in her eyes.

"No," Erard paused, leaning over the back of a chair and searching her face. "That is the distressing part of us Americans; we all apologize for such emotions, as if we should be ashamed of having them."

"I shall not have them long. I am a woman and take on the colour of my habitation."

"You are a woman and will die hard — unless you make a dash for the open air, for freedom." He spoke tranquilly, with calculation. Mrs. Wilbur started as though he had blundered upon a secret, not confessed even to herself.

"Freedom! I have been making disturbances all my life to be free. And what have I done? I am not worth it."

"Some people must get their freedom, no matter how they take it!"

"It isn't merely the art, or the excitement of intellectual life, which I crave so much. There are other things no one can know. I am sinking, sinking — "

"Why struggle so futilely? Isn't there a simpler, more direct way?" Erard fixed his eyes on her face while he made his proposal of mastership. Mrs. Wilbur flushed slowly without speaking. He continued after a momentary pause, "If you crave the *other* life." And the silence seemed to say, if you would consent to the adultery of minds; if you would become once more my follower, my pupil. "This *is* mephitic for some people, you and me for example," Erard went on slowly,

"who have the necessity to think and feel, who care only for thought and feeling."

How far her pent-up soul would have pushed her it is hard to say, if Molly Parker, looking about the house for Mrs. Wilbur, had not found them at this juncture, with intent, serious faces, flushed with their talk. She slipped over to her friend, and taking the earnest face daintily between her hands, kissed it here and there.

"Getting yourself all fussed up over art and emotions," she commented with imperturbable freedom. "You don't know that there's been a great fire over in the stockyards district; burned out four blocks. A whole village full of people are homeless. You can still see the light in the sky from the west windows."

From the dining-room windows the angry glow against the dull sky seemed only a few blocks away. Now and then a stream of full-bodied, serpentlike fire leapt up to lick a stretch of wall still standing. Then as a black stream of water fell on the fire, there was a momentary darkness until the caldron light from the interior shot the ascending smoke and steam with a lovely, controlled glow.

"It looks so near," Molly Parker shivered. "Oh! the poor people!"

"It must be four miles away," Mrs. Wilbur answered.

"Rebellious nature," murmured Erard, glancing at Mrs. Wilbur. "An uncaged element goes roaring forth, hotly devouring the idle works of man."

"A year ago," Mrs. Wilbur remarked, "when the strikers set fire to the cars on the Panhandle tracks,

it was more awful. It was a hot July night and the city had been lowering all day; no one knew what might happen. Suddenly at dusk the whole horizon flamed up with a fierce streak of red. Imagine the mobs of men and women hooting about the flaming cars and the soldiers driving them back. Such terrible naked passions came to the surface!"

"Yes," Molly Parker assented. "I never knew before how necessary it is for us all to behave ourselves; how little it would need to smash this civilization we take for granted."

"Chicago had a chance to see what democracy really is," Erard scoffed. "It's like dynamite. Everything is placid until you drop it; then there is an upheaval and the sky gets lurid. The question is how much of this social dynamite you can carry without dropping it."

"I can't see what Chicago has to do with it," Molly Parker retorted defiantly.

"Only that there is rather more dynamite here than in most places. The average man is your tin-god. When some day there are too many average men, and they all think stupidly that they have the same rights to an average kind of easy living, why, you're going to have a portentous row, for a democracy is at the bottom irreligious and unidealistic. The 'people' will not starve patiently and pathetically while the successful neighbour builds his palace."

"Well," Miss Parker announced finally, "the less talk about it the better. I guess Chicago will find a way out of its troubles. And I like the men who put their shoul-

ders to the democratic wheel; it's the only one that goes to-day anyhow."

Erard laughed indifferently. The smoke was rolling up now a purple black, shot occasionally with cardinal red.

"I believe I will wander over there. I should like to get the effect of that tawny colour near at hand."

When he had left them Miss Parker broke out impatiently, tapping her foot against the floor.

"Such an inhuman way to take things! To watch that awful fire merely to get a sensation in reds and blacks! He would come to my funeral just to see the effect of the black coffin, the green sward, and the minister's white gown. He makes me think of a mushy green caterpillar, stuffed out with nice sensations, improperly assimilated. There he goes down Forty-fourth street, picking his way and squinting at the houses."

"You shouldn't begrudge anybody a glimpse of beauty here in Chicago, even if it takes four blocks and a million to make it," Mrs. Wilbur laughed in a hard, set manner. "We were talking about that — what sacrifices to make for the mind and the sense of the beautiful — when you came in."

Molly Parker seized her hand impulsively.

"Adela, *don't*, — don't indulge yourself in sentiment of that sort."

"What?"

"About being unhappy here in this strong new world. You have chosen to live here, and you have shown how able you are. Do let yourself be happy." She glanced involuntarily at the rich room.

"I hate it," Mrs. Wilbur said coldly, noticing her glance. "But how stirred up you are. I am not contemplating anything desperate."

"You will. You are just the kind to shock the whole world, to make yourself wretched for life and your friends too, because you have worked yourself into some exalted fancy. Why can't you drop problems and sensations and the ends of life — and live like a good human being from hour to hour. Sometime you will find that in your anxiety to get just the best, you have lost even the common good. Here is your house, your child, your husband — "

"Yes," the older woman agreed wearily. "Why do I make such a fuss? Why do you and the others bother about me?"

"I suppose because we love you. You don't deserve it, but there it is, the mystery. Your friends are anxious that you should have all the bothers taken away, that you should be at your best and happy."

"My friends! They had better give up trying."

"Your Uncle Sebastian, Mr. Jennings, and I — "

"Thornton Jennings!" Mrs. Wilbur repeated the name wistfully. "There is a soul — I haven't seen him for weeks."

"Promise me that you will let me know if you ever think of doing anything desperate."

Mrs. Wilbur laughed and kissed her. "I'll take you along too, to look after me."

While they made ready for the dinner-party of the evening, the talk ran on in the commonplace channels of

dress and dinner guests. Mrs. Wilbur's face cleared, and she became that object rarely seen of men, — a woman's woman absorbed in trivialities. From dress they got to the kindergarten, to Molly's latest suitors, — especially to Thornton Jennings. Him they discussed from every point of view, Molly detailing bits of conversation, his personal habits, gossip about him by other women. All the odds and ends which, unknown to a man, go to make the picture he presents to the woman of his adoration.

"I don't know him!" the younger woman exclaimed at last. "How is this, Adela, *bien porté?*" She shook herself into her evening dress. "When he begins to make love I shall know, — it would be nicer if they had made the skirt the least bit fuller."

"I don't think so, but if you want, Jane can let it out. John says Ikel and Wren are awfully clever and successful."

"One doesn't marry a man's brains altogether, — yes, do send Jane, — one runs off with clever men."

They could hear already the slight commotion of the household, preparing itself for the function of the day. Mrs. Wilbur at last hurried away to her own dressing-room.

There was talk that night at dinner of the fire and the severe loss it meant to Packington; of the new tariff bill, which was dragging its soiled body tediously through the weeks; of the tremulous condition of the money market: and, among the women sitting lethargically over coffee in the library, some gossip of the coming lectures, of Calve's latest escapade, and lastly of the difficulties of English

men-servants. Mrs. Wilbur's mind wandered back to Erard and the interrupted talk of the afternoon. Even the money market, with the prospect of another hard year threatened by the scandalous ignorance of a number of irresponsible little men at Washington, could not seem to her as vital as the strange evening glow in a half-faded picture that hung in a room four thousand miles away. Until that glow faded entirely from the lovely fields, and the warm flesh tints of the naked figures went out altogether into the darkness of unconceived things, there would exist in the world a comforting, happy idea for all who passed that way heedingly.

CHAPTER VII

THE lectures went admirably. Mrs. Wilbur's house was crowded every Wednesday morning for the eight weeks of the course with "the most prominent and fashionable leaders among Chicago women." The new house did something to attract; the lecturer himself more, having the skill to hold the curiosity of his audience with his novel point of view, while he tickled the sensibilities of the most intelligent. Then the gossip about Erard's old intimacy with Mrs. Wilbur added sauce to the affair. Given that basis for elaboration in any other great city, an acrid scandal would have fermented rapidly; Chicago was sensible and tolerant. For the irrationality of any serious entanglement between the clever, prosperous, and rising Mrs. Wilbur and the personally unprepossessing and penniless young man, who in professional standing was rather like a dancing-master, was too apparent to need statement.

As the lectures drew to a close, other matters occupied Mrs. Wilbur's attention. Her child gave her anxiety. Then a letter from her Uncle Sebastian, a pathetic arrangement of his affairs on paper, had disturbed her. A telegram from St. Louis summoned her the eve of the last lecture. She hurried away with a forlorn feeling at the heart. Somehow Uncle Sebastian, sparing of

words as he had been, was a pillar of sympathy. How much alone she should be without him!

She found him very feeble — placid as ever, with an increased distance of abstraction in his face. He smiled on seeing her, and the next day collected himself enough to say something about his affairs.

"You will have most of it — a respectable fortune." Later he said with a sigh, "I've had misgivings about Erard, — the way I treated him. Perhaps I drove him to give up doing anything worth while."

His niece comprehended this wistful thought, and the desire to give Erard help even if he should make nothing of himself. As the old man got ready to die, the eternal desirability of success, of making a stir in this patchy world of ours, seemed less self-evident. To know something beautiful, to make others know it, — best of all to create a new beautiful thing, a bit of colour, a union of tones, a fine line, that was perhaps the only solace for much pain.

Mrs. Anthon had taken her brother-in-law in hand more vigorously since her daughter's marriage. And at seventy Sebastian Anthon felt that it was hardly worth while to protest against his environment. He had compromised with himself for his life of ineffective respectability by leaving his money largely to his niece, whom he regarded as the most enlightened member of his family.

"You can throw it away somehow," he explained, weakly.

"Yes," Mrs. Wilbur answered soothingly, "I will help people to explode, and *I* will see that *he* —"

"No, you cannot do anything for him now."

Later he raised himself enough to say querulously, "Why did *you* marry Wilbur?"

She smiled sadly.

"But it will be *your* money, not Wilbur's. And perhaps," an amused and slightly wicked smile crept over his face, "there will not always be a Wilbur." That seemed to be his hope in leaving her this money.

Then he had been content to lie without speaking, his hand resting in hers. A few hours later, when he had died, she fancied that the face, instead of looking at her emptily, spoke again frankly. "There are few great things in this troublesome life. Don't live to be old and miss them." She kissed the white cheek and left him to sleep undistracted and appeased.

Her anxiety for her child made her leave immediately after the funeral. A few days later she received an account of the will. The only item she found much interest in was a legacy to Molly Parker — a thousand a year to add to her tiny income. "Dear old uncle," she thought, "he knew she would like it best just this way from his hand, not mine."

Every thought now centred on the little Sebastian; her child seemed a refuge, the remnant of her former life. He bound her to her husband, to the pledges she had made, and she could not contemplate a future without that bond. All her rebellion over the child's coming maddened her. How futile she had been! Through him, she was responsible to a world that had some elements of gracious affection in it. So she passed the

days in a hush, where every breath from the feeble little body sounded separately in her ears and sent a twinge of pain and reproach into her whole being. She could not cry over it—that was not her way; she could see people and carry about a cold, impassive face. Her hardness frightened Molly Parker.

"Don't you care?" she exclaimed impulsively, bluntly.

"Care?" The word echoed back as if sounded from her whole tense being. "It is most myself that is going." But her husband was puzzled to find her so "unfeeling."

One windy afternoon in the early spring she came to the library and led him, with a firm step, to the child's room, where they sat without speaking until the low breathing ceased with a flutter.

"It is over," she explained, in a matter-of-fact voice. She took a little shawl and laid it softly over the child as if it might be cold. Then she rested the head gently on the pillow and stood quietly looking at her child.

"Adela." Wilbur had put an arm about her waist to comfort her. His eyes were wet. She looked at him blankly, wonderingly.

"It is over," she repeated slowly, looking back at the child. Then disentangling herself from her husband's arm she said "Come," and opened the door.

Wilbur followed, amazed and hurt, feeling that his attempts to be near her in their trouble had been repulsed. Her mood was the same the next day when he had kissed her and spoken hopefully of the life that was yet before them. If bereaved now, checked in their full tide of

possession, why, the years would bring them other children. Theirs was a common grief.

She had looked at him vacantly, as if he had been talking of an outsider, or some small possession that had been and now was gone to be replaced by another. "It is over," she repeated, "gone." She wondered if he could understand that some things went, never to return.

Thus he had his grief, a good, honest grief, his tears and his sentiment over his firstborn. Then hopeful physical sanity, the round of living, obliterated the slight scar. But the event left him with a sore, puzzled feeling over his wife. She had been growing so stately, so cold and forbidding. Tucked away in his mind was a memory of the talk at Remsen's, and something told him that his trouble dated from that night.

He was wrong. It dated some generations back, and it mattered little when the breach declared itself. It was there, and widening in little ways. It was a relief to him when, a few weeks after the child's death, his wife brought about a business talk.

"You know Uncle Seb left me almost all his money?" Wilbur nodded.

"It's in bricks, and for some personal reasons I don't think I care to disturb it. It might have been for the child, you know, and now it can lie until I see my way to using it. But I should like to use my own fortune, if you can convert the investments to cash."

Wilbur waited attentively. He was preparing to leave for his office: the brougham was standing outside on the clean white flags.

"I should like to turn over to you just what this place cost, one hundred and fifty thousand, wasn't it? If there is anything left of my fortune, you can put it to my credit."

"Buy the house?" Wilbur asked, puzzled.

"Yes, — if you have no objections."

"I planned to give it to you clear of all mortgage in June, as a birthday present."

"Oh! no, you *mustn't* do that."

"Why not?"

Mrs. Wilbur left her breakfast and walked nervously across the room. "I shouldn't feel quite right about it."

Wilbur flashed out what was in his mind.

"Your old nonsense over the traction stocks!"

"We had better not go into that matter. After all, I suppose it is only a question of form, but I should like to feel that as long as I live here, my home represents my money."

"So you put yourself off from me, and what is good enough for me isn't for you."

Mrs. Wilbur looked at him coldly.

"We disagreed: you don't understand my position."

"I'll be hanged if I do."

"Will you sell the house?"

Wilbur got up to leave in a pet. Then his good-nature returned, — it was all such a ridiculously small matter.

"Why, of course, Ada; it only amounts to a change of name in the stocks. I'll bring you the deeds in a few days."

He kissed her lightly and left the room. She opened her letters one by one, absent-mindedly, tossing the envelopes into the fire. Then she ordered her carriage, and gathering up the mass of loose notes, went to her library. She could not straighten out the difficulty merely by a transfer of names on some pieces of paper.

CHAPTER VIII

When Mrs. Wilbur returned after the death of her child to the world of clubs and visits, she learned that Erard had been invited to Minneapolis and Omaha to deliver lectures. She heard rumours that he was considering "taking up a permanent residence" in America as curator for a museum of art in some western city. The idea struck her as so ideally humorous that she felt it must have emanated from Erard. In the early spring he appeared in Chicago, this time visiting Mrs. Stevans and "getting acquainted" quite thoroughly. When he attended the opera in Mrs. Stevans's box, the vast hall of knowing neighbours remarked: "There's Mrs. Wilbur's Erard."

Public opinion over Erard was divided. He did not create such a sensation as his advent before the Fair might have excited. Chicago had become cloyed with real celebrities that came and stayed and dined for long weeks. When the men met him at dinners and receptions, they treated him well enough, but without cordiality. They thought him a kind of adventurer who dealt in the frills of life. Therefore, he was consigned to the women as an emasculated specimen.

Mrs. Wilbur's mind came back to Erard frequently. She envied his air of detachment, and she scrutinized

minutely all his enigmatic talk to her in half-phrases of tantalizing irony. He was identified with the other life of the mind and spirit, the craving for which was getting hold of her again. He was a repository of elusive sensations towards which she looked and hungered.

She met him at this period, inadvertently, on an occasion that gave emphasis to his power. She had driven to a distant point on the North Side, and on the return her carriage was stopped as the coachman attempted to turn into Michigan Avenue. It was well past noon, yet the streets were thronged with people. Soon the strains of a military band could be heard from the north. Then she remembered that her husband had said something about a monument to be dedicated on the Lake front, and she recalled the fact that tickets had been sent them for the ceremonies. These she had handed over to Molly Parker, not caring to broil for an hour in the sun for the sake of hearing the windy eloquence of war oratory. That she should have forgotten the event, which had been talked about for months, showed how little interest her neighbours' affairs had for her. It was too late to turn back now; the street had packed in close behind with vehicles and spectators. She settled herself to the delay with a languid curiosity. Fortunately her carriage had been intercepted at the verge of the avenue where the procession was to pass, and through the lowered window she could easily survey the whole scene.

The high buildings about were black with people. At her right the large casements of the Metropolis Club

were swung open, and she caught sight of a number of gentlemen smoking comfortably in armchairs. On the street the people jammed up to the wheels of the carriage — a motley crowd of business men, clerks, boys, and women. They stared into her brougham with frank curiosity and exchanged remarks about the equipage. Mrs. Wilbur felt as if she ought to alight and stand with the others; somehow in this city and at this ceremony the luxury of her horses and carriage was misplaced. But her eyes were held by the soft blue sky, and the lake-water freshening in the gentle wind. Between her and the lake, off a little to one side, was the scaffolding for ticket-holders, already black with people, and in the centre the canvas tent surrounding the new statue of the warrior.

The music came nearer; the banks of spectators on the avenue surged back before the platoon of police. In the jam that resulted she caught sight of Erard's thin figure, swayed back into a doorway near her carriage. He soon detected her, and edging his way into the press, he succeeded in gaining the carriage, where he stood by the open window, resting his body against the wheel. By this time the police had passed, and the first band; next came a few irregular lines of veterans who were cheered enthusiastically.

"I wonder how they'll do it," Erard shouted into the carriage. "Mrs. Stevans gave me a ticket, but I was too late to secure my seat."

Mrs. Wilbur nodded. The veterans had been succeeded by the barouches in which the officials of the

occasion were driven. Then came the governors of the neighbouring states, surrounded by their suites, — civilians who sat awkwardly on their horses. Each state was cheered, by the boisterous crowd, as its representative passed. Suddenly the cheers changed to derisive howls, laughter, and hoots.

"What is the matter?" Mrs. Wilbur leaned out of her carriage as far as possible to see what had disturbed the decorum of the occasion.

"They've got a kind of buffoon," Erard answered. "The gentleman hasn't a good seat."

"That is the governor of Illinois," Mrs. Wilbur exclaimed, blushing unconsciously at the spectacle. "Oh, it's a shame — here of all times — before the people."

"They don't seem to like it — the people," Erard remarked, as low cries of "Shame, shame," rose on all sides.

"Why, this is a public disgrace before the world!" Mrs. Wilbur seemed to take the affair personally.

"He has other bad habits, I have heard." Erard spoke jauntily. Mrs. Wilbur looked at him with startled eyes. "What have you heard?"

"If all one hears is only a quarter true, your governor should be accompanied by his familiar spirit, his Mephisto of the golden touch."

"What do you mean?" Mrs. Wilbur had an irrational apprehension in her voice.

"Why, they name the exact figure he received from Mephisto for his soul — if he has one. The *Thunderer* came out with it this morning in dollars and cents, one hundred thousand odd."

"Oh!" Mrs. Wilbur turned her face away as if personally relieved. "Mere newspaper stories. Dick doesn't like him."

Erard shrugged his shoulders sceptically. "Others say it beside 'Capitalist Dick.' And it is a picturesque fable anyway: it all suits." He motioned down the avenue whither the reeling figure of the governor had disappeared. "Drunk with wine and wealth: your democracy has reached a wallowing era."

"That cannot be true." Mrs. Wilbur returned to the *Thunderer's* accusation. Erard looked at her ironically, as if amused at her earnestness.

"One hears it elsewhere. It comes pretty straight. Your fat Mephisto selected an agent, a young society man, who let it out over *his* cups."

Mrs. Wilbur was silent. The procession wound on, with companies of regular troops and boyish-looking militia, then endless organizations of labour in black suits, carrying many little banners. By this time the press about the carriage relaxed; the street became once more passable.

"I am on my way home," Mrs. Wilbur remarked. "If you are going south, I will take you."

Erard accepted the offered seat, and the coachman began the intricate process of retreat. "I have not seen you for a long time." Erard looked at his companion closely.

"No! It's been a strange year! And now I hear news of your accepting us permanently."

Erard smiled. "I shall spend next winter in Rome."

She sighed.

"And *you?*"

"Here, I suppose, unless the impossible happens."

The carriage had gained the avenue once more beyond the procession. They could hear the booming of the cannon from the ships in the harbour: the speeches had begun.

"I thought," Erard continued slowly, "you were arranging yourself for another career."

Mrs. Wilbur blushed unreasonably.

"I had almost begun to count on your help in my next work." She said nothing, thus inviting him to explain his meaning. "You mustn't throw yourself away. You are too fine for — this." His gesture was expressive.

"Too feeble, rather," she protested.

"You will never gain peace until your mind is satisfied."

He seemed to read her thoughts, to have accompanied her these past months, and now to say the fitting, final word.

"It would take a great deal — a catastrophe — to move me. Woman's modesty is one-half inertia."

"The catastrophe has come, perhaps."

Mrs. Wilbur shook her head. "I don't know. Yet sometimes I think so."

They were silent until the carriage reached the boulevard where the Wilburs' house was situated.

"You have given up painting!" Mrs. Wilbur exclaimed irrelevantly. "I am so sorry for that. Doing,

even feeble doing, seems to me so much more real than all this criticism."

"On the contrary," Erard remarked, "the critic is the comprehensive, the understanding, the sensuous soul. The desire to 'do,' as you call it, is an egotistical conceit, and generally a desire for notoriety."

"Perhaps in part," Mrs. Wilbur admitted, thinking momentarily of her husband.

"The one thing in life is to enjoy." Erard watched her closely to observe how she would take this frank hedonism.

"No, not that," she protested. "I cannot accept your view."

"Make all the pretty phrases about it you can,"— Erard shrugged his shoulders, — "it comes to that. You know it."

Mrs. Wilbur shook her head. "Then we are beasts!"

"Superior beasts, yes."

The carriage drew up at the door of the great house. In the dazzling atmosphere of this June day the stone seemed whiter, harder than ever. It had taken on very little stain or age.

"I have brought you a mile beyond your destination. The man will drive you back."

"No!" Erard refused. "The air is really too fine."

Mrs. Wilbur turned to mount the white steps, then lingered. She looked at Erard, her mind passing over his shambling figure and lustreless features on to the sweet garden of delights with which somehow she had, strangely enough, identified him. A rush of feeling, of

longing unutterable for the beautiful, for the dream, surged through her heart. Oh! for one moment of escape from these endless avenues, from this flaunting city, from Wrightington and money, and, yes, her husband! To hold once more the holy peace of beauty and with it to still her rebellious heart.

Erard seemed to wait for something.

"You will call?" she asked at length.

He looked annoyed; he had expected a more significant result from their talk.

"Yes, I think so, very soon. In a fortnight I shall be shaking the dust—"

"I *must* see you again. It is all such a tangle!"

As Erard turned down the boulevard, he met Wilbur, and raised his hat, rather vacantly.

CHAPTER IX

Among the men who had been watching the procession from the comfortable armchairs of the Metropolis Club was John Wilbur. He had recently been received as a member, — an event deeply gratifying to him. In his "hustling years," as he called the period before the opening of the new house, he had not thought much about clubs. But success translated itself this way. He had become much more zealous for all possible social distinctions than his wife, for she had always lived abreast of the society where she had been placed.

This afternoon Wilbur had noticed his wife's carriage caught in the jam of the street below, and he had watched the conversation between her and Erard, and finally their disappearance. At the club he had heard a good deal more about Erard than at his own home. He found that he was considered a source of reliable information about Erard by those few men who were interested enough in the young man to remember him. It irritated Wilbur because, apart from his indifference to Erard, it always chafed him to feel that certain aspects of his wife were outside his comprehension. He even suspected at times that, now they no longer had business interests in common, he bored her. Bored his wife! Thus this afternoon Erard made a very significant figure in the

landscape. All the crude instincts of the man from a Michigan farm were stirred. Erard should "get"; no gossip about his home!

Wilbur proceeded in this business about as delicately as he would if he had had a clerk to censure. His wife had been given too free a rein: she must feel that his interests, if not propriety, were to be considered. In this mood he followed his wife into the house, where he found her sitting idly by the west window of her little room. A book had fallen on the seat by her side; she seemed to be brooding over difficult thoughts.

"Ady," Wilbur's voice roused her like a roll of thunder, "I saw you talking to Erard this afternoon under the windows of the club, and then take him away with you."

Mrs. Wilbur opened her eyes and waited. Wilbur fumed. It was like a thunderstorm without the rain, — oppressive, with no hope of after-relief. "When does he get out of here?"

"How should I pretend to know! He is visiting Mrs. Stevans."

"A man doesn't want his wife talked about at all the clubs," he began again in bungling fashion. Mrs. Wilbur's eyes grew cold.

"You mean?"

"I mean that you have been foolish about that Erard ever since you knew him, by all accounts."

"Stop!" Mrs. Wilbur raised her hand. "That is quite enough. I am sorry you have been listening to gossip."

Wilbur was a churchgoing Presbyterian Christian. What he was doing he regarded, not only as manly, but as conscientious. He had no other traditions of conduct in such affairs.

"It isn't enough, unless you promise to send him away the next time he calls here. I don't want you receiving his visits, now there's talk."

"No," his wife replied, growing colder, her words falling like little flakes of ice. "I cannot do that; I see no reason for it. You can instruct the footman to keep him out of the house if you like. But I shall never refuse to see him; and," — she turned to her writing-table and prepared to answer a note, — "I shouldn't take that course, if I were you."

She had not intended this last remark as a threat it had been prompted by a desire to make the situation endurable. It would precipitate a crisis, if he should become aggressive and humiliate her before her servants. Wilbur, however, had had the uncomfortable feeling of living in reproof ever since the call at the Remsens; now he intended to exercise *his* moral sense.

When a few minutes later Mrs. Wilbur ascended the stairs, which swept in a gentle curve around the north side of the hall, she could hear her husband below her, giving orders to the butler. He was concluding in loud tones, "Smith, if Mr. Erard calls after this, we shall not be at home. Remember and tell the footman that we shall always be out to Mr. Erard."

"Yes, sir," she heard Smith's galvanic voice reply. It was the first order of the kind ever given in that house.

Some acquaintances came in during the evening, and the conversation grew warm over one of the innumerable strikes in the city. Wilbur was emphatic, as usual, in behalf of the capitalists, "the right of a man to do what he wanted with his own." His wife remembered that this illiberal attitude had grown steadily since his first success. He had become more and more convinced that the poor man's poverty was his own crime. She leaned her white face against the soft cushion in her chair, and closed her eyes to shut out thought.

Yet she could not help thinking of the procession, of the loathsome figure on horseback, and the absent Mephisto — and of her husband, in some way united to this crew. She had not triumphed; she had not held him to the finer courses of conduct. And she had not even kept her home unspotted: this house was really Mephisto's; he had merely tossed it to a hanger-on.

She looked again at that husband, regarding him for the first time objectively, as if he were an outsider — with a dangerous perception of the doubleness of their personalities. To perceive that, marks the end of marriage. She had no harsh feelings, no great resentment at his clownish reproof; he was not her mind and thought and heart. He was simply a man whom she knew uncommonly well, and on whose points good and bad she was an authority. She could be very fair to the good points, — that was a fatal sign! He had not deteriorated in the years of marriage, had developed no vices or brutality. He was the same confident, shrewd, adaptable American she had married three years

ago. A little more eager then and impulsive; more fluid, perhaps, at the age when nothing is impossible of accomplishment, at least in the belief of an admiring woman. The fire of the struggle in Chicago had left him less fluid, but more powerful. Alas! it had burned out all minor alloys, leaving him a steel weapon, fashioned by modern society, for use in converting the earth into the hands of plutocracy.

The wealth that had come to them early in life, and her own social powers, had suddenly placed him in a world for which he had no traditions ready to assist him. He was the American peasant. He did not eat with his knife, nor break any commonplace amenity. He was educated, too, even if merely in a varnishing way, much more than hosts of his comrades. But he was, nevertheless, the peasant. Anywhere else there would have been intermediate stages in the social evolution where he would have stuck, his descendants to go on as they proved ready and had imbibed the ideas of service and honour that befitted the possessors of great power. But Wilbur with one powerful effort had gained the heights, and he had no humbleness, no distrust,—nothing was too good for a clever man who had made his money.

Why *could* she see all this so clearly? Had she ever loved him? For, had she loved him, her eyes would have shrunk from the sore. When did she begin to fail in loving him? Her grave face still rested upon her husband in this searching wonder, until she noticed that he was uncomfortable. Once she heard the footman cross

the hall to answer a ring; after an interval he returned with a card which he left on the hall table. Erard had called and been dismissed. She had little personal interest in the fact: Erard, indeed, was quite an unimportant person.

When the last visitor had left and Mrs. Anthon had talked herself into sleepiness from the lack of any conversational opposition, Wilbur prepared to put the lights out as usual.

"Wait a minute, John." These were the first words she had spoken to him since their conversation before dinner. "I have something to say to you, and I had rather say it here where we meet — on a more formal footing."

Wilbur, who had seen the card on the table, squared himself in front of the fireplace and prepared to be kind and firm and just.

"I know that you will think what I am going to propose is queer," she began gently, "and I am afraid that you will think it wrong. But I must, I must do it."

Wilbur's face wore a frightened look, as though he feared a confession of deadly sin.

"I want to leave you, to go away somewhere, to Europe probably."

"What for?"

"Because I am not happy here. I cannot take the interest I had in Chicago or in our affairs, and I am thinking constantly of other things. I am no longer a good wife, I believe." She had no idea how literally Wilbur would take this admission.

"You don't mean to say it's come to that with Erard." Wilbur's face assumed a sneer, as an outward reflection of his opinion of Erard. Mrs. Wilbur rose as if suddenly whipped.

"What do you mean? No! you needn't explain. I understand." Her manner changed to a contemptuous coolness. "I am sorry that my determination to leave your house should coincide so exactly with your vulgar outbreak over my old friend. No, I shall not leave Chicago with him! Had I thought of doing so, I should probably not have consulted you, though you and my mother have done what you could to goad a woman to that."

"But," she continued firmly, "my feelings, my determination, have been growing, growing," she repeated the word hopelessly, seeing how difficult it was to make her conduct seem rational, not mere caprice. "And it may be for only a few months. I want to get away by myself."

Wilbur would not abandon the Erard motive.

"I didn't suppose you meant to run away with him, but he's stirred you up; got you all out of gear, with his twaddle and sentiment."

"Perhaps he has hastened matters," Mrs. Wilbur admitted, anxious to do justice to any reasonable arguments. "But that is immaterial really. He merely made me think faster — although we never referred to my married life."

"Do you pretend to justify your conduct?" Wilbur fumed. He was plainly embarrassed by the suddenness of this great question.

"Not at all," Mrs. Wilbur replied, with a touch of sarcasm, "all the justification will be on your side. There's no excuse for me, since you have not threatened my life nor committed adultery. You will have universal sympathy."

They thought silently for a few minutes. Then she added, — "And I should want you to have this house and all the money I had when we were married — in any event."

"Have you any objections to me?" Wilbur asked roughly.

And thus they continued to discuss the matter in the still room of the still house that Mrs. Wilbur had likened to a tomb. The man's sense of wanton, unprovoked injury increased as each bend of the argument revealed itself. He was so irreproachably right! a truth which his wife did not attempt to deny.

"But why do you want to retain a despicable woman?" she asked coldly, at last.

If he loved her, she thought, he would not try to convince her with arguments of propriety and religious exhortations. And if he showed that he loved her passionately she would not have the courage to leave him. One expression of longing love would have bound her hand and foot.

He did love her, in his way, as a busy man married nearly four years, who could not devote himself exclusively to sentiments, does love. He admired her, was proud of her fine presence in dress, thought she was a clever woman — indeed the most superb creature of her

sex he had ever seen. And he loved domesticity in itself. He had an honest loathing for immorality, and a healthy respect for the home. He hoped for a family of children "to put ahead in the world." He was prepared to be a good husband and father, and, now! a catastrophe from a clear sky. A man's pride receives a severe cuff when the handsome woman he has secured, as he thinks, on a life-tenure, shows the world that she is sick of the bargain.

They gave up the subject in sheer exhaustion that night, Mrs. Wilbur agreeing to take no final step without further consideration. As she left the room, her husband said blankly, "You couldn't have cared much all along!"

She turned with a gleam of irritation.

"It was to be a partnership, wasn't it? There was too much of that idea. Marriage isn't a partnership. It's —"

He waited expectantly.

"I don't know," she moaned. "I have done you a wrong, somehow."

CHAPTER X

THE business of the Legal Aid Society had brought Thornton Jennings to know one Peter Erard, an operative in a piano-factory. He lived with his father, a helpless old man, on one of the long traffic streets which pierce the stockyards district. In the section where the Erards lived, the narrow frame cottages were sunk below the level of the street, which seemed to have bestirred itself recently and risen above the squalor of the marsh. Jennings had asked Molly Parker to visit the Erards, when Peter met with an accident at the factory, that ended finally in a fever and a gradual decline. While he was idle Jennings and Miss Parker did what they could for him. They discussed the possibility of Mrs. Wilbur's inducing Simeon to do something for the old man, at least in the event of Peter's death. But Miss Parker was afraid of the subject in her friend's present mood.

The two felt that Peter's misfortune was more pathetic than showed on the surface. "He yearns for what the other one got," Jennings said. "*He* stuck by the old people, and yet he had the call, too."

When Molly reflected dubiously that it did seem as if conscience didn't pay, Jennings puzzled her by asserting: "It doesn't — unless you can't help it. Peter couldn't, and so he is dying over there in that hole with his sharp

little eyes unsatisfied. Simeon could, and so he sails to Europe for a poultice that will heal the abrasions we have made on his sensorium."

Miss Parker learned much from pondering on this case of Peter Erard. He was such a confirmed sceptic, she found, that she hesitated to proffer her simple religious panacea. Jennings seemed to her sceptical also, when he insisted that Peter's sacrifice was quite irrational. To her insistent *why*, he answered dreamily, — "'*Why, why,*' — you can't answer *whys*. Why do we hate and love, and why do we live? The Master wills it; it is idle to talk back."

This was a vague reason, yet wonderfully comforting to Molly, chiefly on account of the authority the propounder had with her. If he were content with this mystery, she must be. So she continued to visit the Erards, and formed plans of using Adela's purse to help the old man. For it was but just that Mrs. Wilbur should pay some of Simeon Erard's bills to society. When Jennings urged that Mrs. Wilbur could probably force Erard to make Peter's last days happy in other ways than with money, Miss Parker shook her head.

"Adela can be as hard as a rock."

"Perhaps she has never been tapped the right way."

Yet to her suggestion that *he* should try tapping the rock, he answered lightly, "I guess I'm not *her* Moses."

It disturbed the equable Molly to realize how much interest he took in Mrs. Wilbur. For "Adela spoils everything," she declared sententiously.

Jennings had it in mind to approach Mrs. Wilbur, at

the first good chance, in behalf of the Erards. He had seen little of her since the fall season; intangible influences kept them apart. Late in June, however, he spent a Sunday in one of the northern suburbs at Mrs. Stevans's "place," and when he arrived from the city in the evening, he discovered Mrs. Wilbur sitting alone on the cool, silent veranda above the lake. The other guests had gone off for a drive along the bluffs. She greeted him with frank surprise.

"I didn't expect to see *you* here."

"They don't seem quite my crowd," he admitted cheerily. "But Mrs. Stevans is a sort of cousin, and she has done her best for me. She has found me a hard case; her good deeds have come to asking me for over Sunday."

"Why haven't you hit it off in Chicago?" Mrs. Wilbur inquired curiously.

"Why haven't you?" the young man retorted. "And I like it tremendously well here. I should want to hang on merely for the pleasure of seeing your crowd thrown into the lake or banged on the head, if they don't reform." He tilted back and forth with suppressed merriment. "I can't help feeling pleased over the growls from the 'masses.' If some of your rich friends keep on grabbing quite so shamelessly, there will be a row. I should hate to shoulder a musket in defence of your palace, Mrs. Wilbur."

"Their selfishness is intolerable," she said fiercely. "I feel stifled when I see them."

"Yet many of them are very good people to see." Her

explosiveness rendered him impartial. "You are too ready to include *all;* there is a splendid remnant — fine men one can honestly admire. Even the selfish ones are merely crude and wrong-headed. You don't do the place justice."

"I can't be just. There is no reason in my life here." She leaned toward him appealingly, longing for sympathy. He was not merely a young man she had seen a dozen times in a fragmentary way. He was so intensely human that she felt she had always known him.

"No, not on your basis, there isn't any reason," Jennings admitted.

She waited for his meaning.

"The refined selfish person can't get satisfied here."

She looked at him inquiringly.

"You have always desired. A tremendous ego, and admirable, admirable," he ended softly.

She was, indeed, beautiful and alluring as she lay in the steamer-chair, questioning him with her anxious eyes. The personal power of her developed, intelligent face excited him, and made him totally forgetful of the Erards.

"You think me pretty bad," she exclaimed, dropping her hand from her face.

"No!" he began to tilt back and forth once more abstractedly. "Of the two souls — the one that demands, the other that accepts — you are the demanding, absorbing kind. Most women accept, ultimately."

They paused, embarrassed at the distance they had gone from the conventional.

"I am sorry," he added softly, "for I don't believe

there is any peace for your kind. You go flaming about the earth, until death extinguishes you."

"Oh! to flame, to burn, to *feel*," she appealed for his alliance in her revolt. He rose from his chair and paced back and forth, his face flushed with an excitement deeper than hers.

"That is not all," he murmured to quiet himself. "There are mighty laws which are holy. And there is holiness itself, a state of spirit in the face of our Lord the Master, and that is peace. It is possible, yes, as possible as the intoxication of passion."

"If I take my life in my own hands, and go where I can spend it joyfully," she spoke deliberately, "then?"

"Then," his low voice swept by her, "you are burned to ashes."

"But I shall do it," she exclaimed defiantly, "I think. Yes! I shall —"

He had come to a stand by her side and looked at her sympathetically. "Well, do it, and God help you when your heart lies cold," he burst out, resuming his tramp.

"I don't think He will help me," Mrs. Wilbur had it on her lips to say. "If"— but the wistful words died unspoken. Her husband's reproach came to her mind. "If you had cared very much!" She had not cared, that was the truth. Jennings had stripped her subterfuges away, — her nausea over the business methods of a few men among the multitude of honest hearts who were building the new world; her irritation over her husband's conduct in the Erard matter; her discontent with Chicago. The reason for her act did not lie

ultimately in any of these causes; it lay in her own soul. Now she knew the unlovely truth.

Could she care? A wayward instinct prompted her to tell this acquaintance who had happened to search her heart deeply, that she could care, if—. But she was afraid. Let him think her merely a craving ego! His truth-telling had made her hard. She would offer no more excuses. She would accept her poverty of soul and take her freedom.

"Well," she said at last, "it is very chill. I am going to my room. Good-by, Mr. Jennings."

She gave him her hand and let him keep it for an instant while she wondered at him, and "at the other kind that accepts." He opened his lips as if to speak, then squared himself stiffly and dropped her hand.

"Good-by," he muttered, and strode down the steps to the edge of the bluff where the moonlight was peeping through the thickets. In old days at college, some had called him the Saint, and some the Blasphemer.

CHAPTER XI

JOHN WILBUR unwittingly brought about the crisis he wished to avoid. Monday morning, on his way to the city, he called at the house of his clergyman, — Dr. Driver, a divine celebrated locally for his eloquence, for the prosperity of his parish, and for his influence over successful business men and their fashionable wives. It seemed to John Wilbur that his wife's condition was one that demanded the services of a spiritual physician, and he explained the case briefly to his minister.

Consequently Mrs. Wilbur had scarcely reached her home after the visit in Lake Forest before Dr. Driver's card was brought to her. Thinking that he had come probably for some assistance in church-work, she went down to the drawing-room at once without laying aside her wraps or hat. Dr. Driver was a tall, sallow-faced, black-moustached man, who wore his thick black hair brushed away from his forehead a little affectedly. His bony figure, protruding under the correct black coat, made many awkward lines. Dr. Driver, after the experience of years in ministering to fashionable parishes in Minneapolis and Chicago, could not be called uncouth, yet Mrs. Wilbur always saw in him the earnest, raw young man from the seminary, his white eyelids

glued in the fervour of extempore prayer, his white linen cravat creeping up over the large collar button in his wrestling with his thought. He had been successful — that appealed to his congregation; they liked a man to be successful in whatever "line" of "work" he had chosen. Dr. Driver's success had been marked by such tangible evidences as the two "handsome edifices" erected during his pastorates in Minneapolis and Chicago. His florid style did not appeal to Mrs. Wilbur, but her husband's admiration of him and the fact that many of their friends were prominent in his church had overcome her aversion to the minister's rhetorical flights and mixed metaphors. Dr. Driver was also a poet, and one or both of his little volumes, "Little Lyrics of Grace," or "Growing Leaves," might be found on the tables of his parishioners; and in the columns of the *Thunderer*, cheek by jowl with Capitalist Dick's American editorials, appeared Dr. Driver's patriotic songs.

The pastor gathered his coat-tails about his thin thighs, seated himself on the edge of a divan, and opened a general conversation upon the new house and Mrs. Wilbur's gratification in her husband's wonderful success. Mrs. Wilbur listened, perplexed by this general harangue, for the regular pastoral call had occurred scarcely a month before.

"Mrs. Wilbur," he exclaimed at last, his eyes rising above her head restlessly, "what a privilege is yours, with the ability and the means to further the moral and material welfare of this great city! Chicago is the great home for intelligent woman. Here she moulds the desti-

nies, the civilization of millions of eager human beings. In our vast city," his voice rose and fell in prophetic intonations, "woman does not creep as the humble handmaiden of charity; she organizes immense reforms, she institutes educational benefits, she advances shoulder to shoulder with men in a common fight against the demons of want and vice."

His victim sat in mystified silence. She saw before her eyes the new church, three blocks away on a neighbouring boulevard, its auditorium in the form of a theatre, with the stage crowned by a high pulpit, which Dr. Driver mounted. Behind were rows of shiny organ pipes, and below at the wing a small door that led to the club-rooms, and eating-rooms, and kitchens, and carpeted assembly-rooms, all in polished oak panelling and furniture, with every modern device of the up-to-date house of God. The doctor should be there, exhorting his comfortable audience, not here distracting her mind during the hours she needed most for clear thinking and clear feeling. Dr. Driver came soon, however, to more specific matter.

"My dear Mrs. Wilbur," he lowered his voice and eyes simultaneously. "I have prayed over you, wondering if you have realized to the fullest your powers and opportunities to do God's work."

"I trust so," his parishioner replied impatiently, feeling that now he was drawing to the purpose of his visit.

"Are you not planning," Dr. Driver's voice grew deeper, more threatening, "in your breast to-day, this very hour, to abandon God's work in his appointed pasture, to turn back like Lot's wife from the vineyard before

you, to forsake husband and home in the pursuit of vain pleasures, of a vainglorious conceited refinement of culture? Are you not planning, I ask you as a daughter of the church, to make a god of your intellectual belly?"

Mrs. Wilbur's face flushed resentfully. "My husband has told you of my proposal to leave his home," she interposed in the torrent of rhetoric.

"Yes. He came to me in the travail of his soul this morning, to his spiritual counsellor, for my poor help in his trouble."

"He did a very foolish thing," Mrs. Wilbur replied haughtily.

"I trust not so. You love your husband, you loved your little child, *his* child, and you will love others yet to be—"

At another time Mrs. Wilbur could have tolerated Dr. Driver's exhortation as merely an exhibition of well-meaning bad taste. To-day she was capable of blasphemies against the bed-rock truths of her fellowmen. If they goaded her, stung her like little flies, she would give the lie to her heart and commit outrages.

"I prefer not to discuss this question." She rose to close the interview, relying upon the frigid dignity that she could throw into her smallest action, to restrain this earnest, vulgar man.

"It is my *duty* to warn you, to counsel you, to say that in abandoning this mighty world of opportunity to which God has called you, the help of these millions of souls,—" he stretched out his arms in his favourite gesture of immensity and numbers.

Mrs. Wilbur asked with a wicked smile, — "Suppose, Dr. Driver, I have no interest in 'millions,' that I believe it is a foolish labour to advance the masses and thus help create more 'millions'? Suppose I believe it is morally wrong to make humanity all a common dull level, and that we ought to strive to produce quality, beauty, single great lives of distinction?"

This wholesale tossing aside the axiom of his life staggered the doctor. "Not long to bring to God all these souls?" He laboured in search of an argumentative basis.

"Mere size, mere numbers, mere collections of human beings who may be made industrious, neat, thrifty, and happy — that picture doesn't stir my enthusiasm any more than mere miles of dwellings or mere millions of bushels of wheat!"

She was becoming tangled in an argument, when Molly Parker dashed in to take her away to a reception. Dr. Driver left at once, and to his wife that night he confided his belief that poor Wilbur had a heavy cross in his misguided wife. She was a proud, haughty, self-interested, and intellectually vain creature, and if she left her home to indulge her conceit in "European salons" she would be lost. It is needless to add that in a few days it was reported quite openly, "Jack Wilbur's wife is going to leave him"; or, as some put it with an additional touch of imagination, "going to cut off with that painter fellow."

Mrs. Wilbur chatted with her friend as the carriage carried them swiftly to the Remsens' that afternoon,

strangely at peace with herself, and determined. Her attention was preternaturally keen, as if her mind was eager to gather last impressions, to fortify itself. She ran across Erard in her first assault on the crowded rooms at the Remsens', and she lingered to talk with him alone for the benefit of a roomful of curious people, well aware that she was adding powder to her husband's guns.

"I called on you the other evening," Erard remarked with intention.

"Yes?" Mrs. Wilbur's voice expressed no concern.

"And you were out. I shall not call again."

"Perhaps it is just as well," Mrs. Wilbur answered indifferently. "Anyway, I shall be going away soon."

"So you have made up your mind. What are you going to do with yourself?"

"How do I know? What can a woman who has dabbled in life all round do with herself, except begin over and dabble all round again?"

"Why don't you make a profession of freedom, now you have given up trying the straddle?"

She did not like the phrase, "profession of freedom": it sounded like a fine way of saying "abandon yourself." Just then some one touched her elbow, and Erard was swallowed up in the surrounding hubbub. She never saw him again in Chicago.

She found herself talking excitedly, yet with a grateful calm at her heart. The room, and the people who were constantly addressing her, seemed very unsubstantial. They belonged to her house on the boulevard, to

the traction stocks, the little child who had gone, to the drunken governor who had sold himself to Mephisto, to Dr. Driver, and the rest of it. They were not a part of her now, and she was gay in the thought.

"Molly," she said at last, "dismiss Thornton Jennings and go fetch your wrap. I am going to drive you home."

Molly Parker faltered, "You are going to tell me something dreadful."

But Mrs. Wilbur, if she had anything dreadful on her mind, appeared serene on their drive home. She talked about Jennings a good deal, and watched her companion slyly. "Would you like to leave Chicago *now*, Molly?"

Miss Parker blushed and kissed her. At the iron gate of the Wilbur house she stepped out of the carriage, directing the coachman to drive Miss Parker home. Then as if to communicate a last nothing, she put her head through the window, and said hurriedly, "Molly, I'm going away soon. I promised to let you know."

She hurried up the steps without waiting to look at the startled face in the carriage. It had been a hard day, but her nerves were strung to a high pitch that evening, for she foresaw another long debate with her husband. The sooner the final break was made now that Dr. Driver had been taken into their confidence the better.

"John," Mrs. Wilbur's eyes glittered as she began, when they were alone in the library, "that was unkind of you, and foolish, to send Dr. Driver here to talk to me."

"I hoped he could make you see the wicked and unchristian character of the act you are contemplating." He understood faintly that his scheme had failed; indeed, had driven her further away.

"We must finish now at once," Mrs. Wilbur continued.

"Have you anything to complain of in your house or in me?" Wilbur asked defiantly. The other evening she might have said in answer something about the traction stocks. But after Jennings had read her soul so easily, she refrained. For one didn't leave one's husband because he was callous in business. Was she the kind of woman to shrink from such misfortune? He went on, "You don't realize the blow you are dealing me and yourself in all the talk your step will make. It will be in the papers twenty-four hours after, that you have run away."

Now that she had discovered what dread was uppermost, it was easy enough to urge her suit. She had thought over this question and had a plan ready. If he had been unconscious of the possible injury to himself and his ambitions, her task would have been harder.

"I don't think you need worry about that," she replied a little disdainfully, "for your friends' sympathy will be entirely with you, and nobody else need know until later. All I ask is to leave you — it may be said for a few months, as other wives leave their husbands, to travel. The house can go on, and doubtless mother will be glad to remain here and —"

"A nice plan," Wilbur interrupted hotly, "to make me a blind for your goings-on with another man."

Mrs. Wilbur flushed quickly, then became white and calm again. "You persist in that insult. Very well, then, you can proceed at once to a divorce. But I think that you will see how much more sensible my plan is. Later you can get a divorce quietly."

"Would you ever come back?" Wilbur asked wistfully.

"I don't believe that you will want me to," she replied more gently, wondering at the man. "If I did return it would be a new beginning, a *real* marriage. I can't tell about that. I must be *free* first."

"It doesn't seem to me you are much of a slave!"

"No?" she was minded to refer to the money that had been used to build their home, but refrained. Suddenly passion broke through her calm manner. "A woman isn't a slave — there is no question of it — when husband and wife are bound together. It makes no difference, — the desert, the mechanical routine of living, — *then*. She can starve well enough. But when they begin to live and to think apart — when I saw you and judged you and condemned you, then all the real freedom was *yours*, and I was degraded."

"You use big words like the women nowadays. When did we separate and what 'degradation' do you bear?"

"We separated when you took ill-gotten gains — no! I mean I saw that we had made a mistake then, we had never really married, and from that time I began to want — some other satisfaction, and to hate Chicago and all there is in it."

Wilbur waited, disturbed and mystified.

"Yes," she went on passionately, "and degraded too.

It is degradation to live another one's life, or to live with him and bear his children — unless they come as the natural fruit of common passion."

"Oh! that's it — you want your husband to be always honeymooning it?"

"Yes," she answered exhausted. "Otherwise, like Eve, a woman discovers that she is naked, and is ashamed. But this is useless. The fact remains — *we* are divorced, and *I* must go and get my life. You may say all the bitter things you wish. But I am not one who accepts," she ended, with a thought back on what Jennings had told her.

"So," said Wilbur cynically, from his position of the partner to whom marriage was naturally more episodic than ultimate. "You believe a woman should experiment, should break her vows if she finds after three years of apparent happiness that she prefers to run about Europe and moon over pictures to sitting by her husband's fireside. Does a vow mean nothing to you?"

"Yes," her voice broke, "a great deal. But I shouldn't advise you to hold me to it."

"You never loved me," Wilbur wandered back to the vital point. "You took me because you were bored or because you couldn't marry Erard, or something of the sort."

"That is a lie," Mrs. Wilbur answered composedly. "If I had known then that on such provocation you would make such low guesses — I should not have married you." She remembered the scene in the Paris salon, the solemnity of it, and a wave of compassion for him

and for herself overcame her. "Don't kill it all, John! Let us part with some respect and honour for one another, not like a man and his mistress."

"Go!" Wilbur exclaimed, excited by the impalpability of the reasons for this absurd and unexpected wrong he was made to suffer. "Go! and don't think I shall follow you and beg you to come back. No, if you crawl here along the boulevard, and pray to be forgiven, I will shut the door on you and curse you."

Mrs. Wilbur opened her lips, then checked herself. "Good-by, John. I am sorry, so sorry you cannot understand."

Wilbur laughed sneeringly. "But your sense of duty is so keen!"

"I must, must," she broke into tears. "I am suffocating here. I may be all wrong. I shall suffer for it!"

"I hope so." He watched her leave the room and grasp the handrail of the stairs to support herself. An old, savage instinct surged up in him, the desire to kill what you could not keep in any other way. That she should calmly decide to walk out of his life after three years of marriage, for no provocation that any reasonable man would consider for a moment, — that was intolerable! And society merely enfeebled the men who had to stand, as he stood, passive. He would like to feel his arms about her, his hand at her throat, and to have her know that for hate as well as for love, she was *his* for ever.

But she walked out of his life.

PART III

CHAPTER I

LATE in August Mrs. Wilbur sailed for Europe. When the ship dropped down the bay, and all the cables with the past were cut, a sense of great joy came over her. As the last sultry breeze from the heated land gave place to the deep-sea air, her imagination, which had been torpid for many months, awoke and saluted the future. She was filled with the romantic excitement that usually only the first voyage creates, — never, alas! to be repeated. No other experience in life is comparable to this passing from the actual and seemingly vulgar into the spot where the fancy has been wont to play. Europe has lived so long and so passionately, and has gathered to itself such a chain of memories, that it casts a spell over semi-barbarian hearts.

She sat long into the nights brooding, while the powerful, silent beast beneath her feet plunged on into the new world, — brooding sensuously like the gourmand returning from the parched deserts who dreams of the fat in the pleasant valleys beyond. And now that the cables were cut, and she was free like this ship to hasten to her haven, the past troubled her little. These nights on the ocean she let her will relax. Why strive? She

would gorge and be satisfied and pay the penalty. *There,* beyond in the soft darkness, was what would satisfy.

Instinctively she had chosen to go to Florence, at least for the present; this spot of passionate delights called her authoritatively. She arrived on a warm, dark night. The gloomy buildings loomed into the black heavens; beneath their walls resounded the staccato note of Florentine life. She slept that night with the rush of the Arno, as it shot the Ponte Trinità, singing in her ears, a tumultuous lullaby. At daybreak the Arno called her to the window while it sang its swift song to the morning. The gentle hills across the river were gilded with floods of warm light. A stately, solitary pine lined the horizon above the Boboli gardens. Up beyond, San Miniato flashed back to her a gleaming message. The city was yet cold and silent in the midst of the bursting loveliness of the day. Her heart beat warmly, intoxicated with the realization of her desires. It was the impossible human dream made real. Towards it she stretched out her hands, hungeringly.

Later she went down into the city, threading her way between the black palace walls to the open fields without the gates, where she could seize the heavens, and the hills, and the glorious full body of light descending to the earth. Yet before long she had wandered back to the Uffizi, ravenous for another sensation. Tremulously she mounted the long flights of the palace stairs and penetrated the outer rooms. At last she had come to her joy, — when patience with subterfuges had ceased, and her soul was eager to worship.

The pictures seemed so peaceful! They had been waiting there quietly all these dreary years of her life, and now they spoke to her calmly, with the clear utterance that comes of removal from things temporal. She abandoned herself to one passion after another, in greedy enjoyment, with mystical sensuousness of feeling; then making a futile effort to remember what she had learned critically four years before, she would try to reason with herself. But all the months of renunciation, of arid living without beauty, took their revenge in a passionate, uncontrollable mastery. The pieces of light and colour before her eyes were not pictures: she was not promenading past dead squares of canvas as she had done so often before. She seized specially upon each shining soul that lay before her, with the delight one has in the discovery of an illuminating thought, or in the still richer consciousness of an expressive person. She remembered Erard's phrase about pictures, — "documents of old passions." Not documents, not dead, her soul asserted; but piercingly alive, godlike revelations.

Her eyes filled with tears, and she laughed at her own ecstasy. Two or three pictures were all that she could contain in this abandonment. When these had burned deep into her and the rush of emotion had subsided a little, she left the gallery, content with the knowledge of their presence, of their nearness. Idling along the narrow quais by the Ponte Vecchio she let the minutes slip past savouringly, listening to the human note of the city, and watching the colours of the walls over the river under San Jacopo's bell-tower.

The afternoons were too precious to spend in the city. The surrounding hilltops from San Miniato to Bello Sguardo, from Fiesole to Cappa Monte, called her. One solitary villa near the brow of Bello Sguardo, with a broad terrace hanging over the valley, took her fancy, and she resolved to rent it. From its lofty terrace under the solemn row of cypresses she would hold Florence in her arms. And across the black-ribboned Arno the hills of Fiesole beckoned her eyes on to the Apennines. While she made arrangements to take possession, she came here in the twilight to brood over the city at her feet. Thus the days passed; she did not know that she was alone.

Bit after bit the past life adjusted itself in her mind, as if fate were arranging inevitably the values. Words out of that past came to mind. She remembered the saying of a shrewd friend, who had dealt much in a service of twenty years with the conscious, striving women of the day. "Why have you earnest, brilliant young women lost the instinct that suppresses the ego? You are terrible egotists. You run about, seeking frantically for entertainment for your restlessness." Yes, she demanded much; Jennings had said it too. But her heart was full now, and she smiled.

Again she thought of Erard, the "Ishmaelite" as some one had called him. One said in the sanctity of effort "those denationalized, consciously devoted artists find at the end, after all their pains to prepare, that there is nothing to express. Creation comes not that way." Perhaps not "creation," but living and satisfaction: in the sanctity of effort one did not understand such matters.

She smiled again, and looked at the purple hill-slope of Setignano.

"You are very beautiful," the wise friend had also said. "But you do not care! I wish you women who long to be appeased cared for your good looks. A little vanity in a woman is a safe thing." Yet she was glad to feel that her beauty existed, like the olive below the terrace, like the golden wave of hair in that picture in the Pitti; for it made the earth richer.

And Molly Parker's last words came back to her. "I had rather you had run off with Erard," Molly had remarked irritably. "At least they say a great passion is sometimes beyond control, but to slip off this way because you are bored!" Again, later,—"It would be better if you had some 'vocation,' as they call it." She remembered that she had protested: "I have the vocation to be myself." To-day she laughed at her pompous words. She needed no excuses; the earth smiled at her.

Erard, even, lay outside her soul with the others in that curious world she had forsaken. Sometime she should see him, but not yet. The days sped in peace. She made ready her villa where peace should be perpetuated. A Chicago acquaintance, catching sight of her standing radiant before the frescoes in the chill chapel of the Carmine, wrote home: "Our Mrs. Wilbur seems very happy with herself. You wouldn't think she was as good as divorced. She hasn't even a decent gloom."

An end to this rapt mood came at last. Business necessitated a journey to Paris. Also a letter from the

irrepressible Molly gave Mrs. Wilbur warning that she was not to be left to her own devices. "I am going over to join you. You've got to have some one to bully and look after you and pet you. I don't approve of you and never shall, but I can't let you be foolish all by yourself. . . . What are your plans — to wander about there with a maid from hotel to pension, or take an apartment and smoke and drink and try to make a man of yourself?" (For Miss Parker's ideas about the modern woman were still crude.) "Plans!" Mrs. Wilbur exclaimed. That was the futile gabble she had tried to escape. One lived without plans. As she prepared to leave her city of delights she sighed; something warned her that the ecstasy of freedom would never flood so high again.

In the last calm, warm night she sat for hours on the terrace of her villa, fearing to leave her dearly bought peace. When she returned to the hotel, winding down between the walled orchards to the heated city, the Arno was singing under the arches of the Trinità. But the song sounded deep and solemn.

CHAPTER II

THE pungent Latin odours emanating from the wine-shops along the boulevards stirred Mrs. Wilbur's memory caressingly. This was Paris, — she dwelt on the word fondly. How eloquent it had been of joy!

She had left the noisome American quarter around the Opera House, where Paris turns a pandering face to the tourist, and selected a little hotel on the Quai, opposite the great palace. Her business with the solemn old lawyer sent by her elder brother was quickly transacted, and at the close she let fall a few pungent sentences to be carried to her family. "My husband is welcome to my fortune. I am glad he is good enough to use it. Fortunately I have enough beside. My family must endeavour to bear the disgrace — I will help them by keeping out of sight." The lawyer talked divorce, but when he found her dumb, departed. "Pretty Walter," as Mrs. Wilbur named her brother, was not so easily disposed of. He had come all the way from the great novelist Maxwell's place in Surrey to look into her situation.

Walter Anthon had had a good time, all these years of his sister's experimentation; he had kept his family informed of the growing circle of celebrities whose fingertips he was permitted to touch. He might have made a

booklet of the dainty notes he had received from Maxwell, the sage novelist, from Sandy Short, the supercilious literary maid of all work, and from Henderson, the celebrated author of closet dramas. Even Gaston had condescended to invite him for a week to his lodge in Scotland. The crowning glory of his career, however, had been when the famous African poet had met in his rooms the great Maxwell. He described the encounter epically to his sister. "Maxwell was moody and sunk in gloom. The African was fierce and taciturn. I trembled. But I plied Maxwell with champagne — he never drinks, you know, but this night at my entreaty he consented to empty five bottles. Then at midnight, the poet laid himself down before the fire on my bearskin, and such talk — " The saga here stayed in mystery.

After entertaining his sister with a list of his conquests in letters, he came to personal affairs. "Are you quite alone?" he asked, glancing at the orderly hotel salon with the little bedroom at one side.

"Yes. I hate maids. It's very jolly being alone."

"You had better get one at once. You don't want to identify yourself with the horrid women who run about alone and put up at hotels and drink whiskies and talk horse. There are some women of the nicest families in England who do that kind of thing now, — are very free. But we Americans cannot afford to go so far."

"Couldn't you join me this winter," Mrs. Wilbur suggested mischievously, "and keep house in Florence? The proprieties would be appeased then."

"No, no, — not possibly, *ma sœur.*" Walter Anthon twisted his moustache rapidly.

"Well, then, you mustn't offer advice."

"My dear sister," Anthon seized his vanishing chance, "you will not be so distressingly vulgar as to put yourself in the way of further — relations with Erard, I —"

This iteration of Erard from one end of America to Europe stirred Mrs. Wilbur's wrath. "I don't know where Mr. Erard will be this winter. I am not in communication with him. But if he should care for my society, I should certainly see him." After a moment she added maliciously, to throw oil on the fire, "And the considerations you mention would not prevent me from doing more."

Walter Anthon rose majestically. "We should cut you, every one."

"Remember that I am still *Mrs.* Wilbur, legally at least," she retorted. Then forgetting her resentment, she continued in a friendly tone. "Walter, why shouldn't we be frank with one another? I shall not spoil your little game in London. You won't find me a social burden. I don't give a penny for your prejudices, but it may comfort you to know that I am waiting for an old friend to join me. Now let us be good acquaintances. Don't feel called upon to meddle with my leaving John. You will not have to suffer for that. And I don't believe that you have any, even romantic grounds, for sorrowing over my morals. Your own will probably keep you busy. Come and see me when I am settled. If you don't like the tone of my establish-

ment, keep away. We really haven't enough in common to quarrel about. Now take some tea." She rang the bell and stood opposite him to laugh.

Walter Anthon took his tea amicably. "Who is the friend?"

"Molly. Perhaps you will look in on us occasionally."

"Uncle Seb left her some money?"

"Lots," Mrs. Wilbur exaggerated.

"I didn't hear that," he mused.

"But you needn't bother about her now," she smiled placidly at him. "Molly has developed; she won't play with you now."

Anthon left the subject. His appreciation of his sister rose in true British fashion in proportion to the snubbing she administered. He offered to present some of his set. But Mrs. Wilbur gaily declined the privilege.

"No, thank you! Celebrities bore me. I don't care to dine with the title-page of a magazine."

She gave him her hand, and he went away, feeling as if he had been treated like a small boy. Mrs. Wilbur laughed to herself that afternoon, while she ran about from shop to shop, or stopped to gaze in the windows, "like any vulgar American."

Mrs. Wilbur decided to wait for Molly in Paris, where she had a number of small matters to attend to. When the sombre days of early November came on, she spent many hours at the Louvre. One morning she was stand-

ing in a small deserted room, before a Holbein portrait, marvelling at an art which seemed more irrevocably lost than most, — at the power of the sure hand that stiffly traced a human face, with the simplest detail, and left it there for centuries, a living criticism of character!

"Not an iota of power lost, is there?" She was hardly surprised on turning to find Erard in their old rendezvous.

"I saw you come in here from the Long Gallery," he explained, "and I made a wager with myself that you were looking for this Holbein."

"Yes," she blushed in spite of herself. "I have seen certain pictures all these years, just as they hung on the walls, frames and all. But they have rehung so many of them, that I miss some old friends."

"Oh, yes, the directors set the fashion in pictures. They have an attic full of canvases up stairs, and every now and then, when the fancy takes them, they whisk an old friend off the walls and replace him with some piece of rubbish they have discovered. Of course the big ones stay, like this fellow, only they have to walk about from room to room."

Then they were silent, each at a loss how to take up the conversation. Erard had met her as if it were the most natural thing in the world to find her here. At last he said brusquely, — "So you found your way back again."

"Yes," she replied weakly, wondering what he knew of the intermediate processes; what gossip he had heard. His next remark was made as much to the portrait

before them, into which he suddenly plunged his face, as to herself.

"You concluded that we are right, — we who care solely for sensations and ideas."

Mrs. Wilbur felt chill at this summary of her emotions. "Ah, well," he continued, using his glasses on the ruff of the Holbein man, "it was just as well to make the experiment, even if it wasted four years. Having satisfied yourself that the duties and privileges of normal society don't amuse you, you will never be bothered again. You've got *that* behind you."

The woman in Mrs. Wilbur suddenly realized how actually she was cut off from the "duties and privileges of normal society," and was not altogether so complacent in the thought as Erard assumed. "I am not planning a future," she replied with an attempt at lightness. Erard turned from the picture and looked at her deliberately, as if to say, "You are in *my* hands now, my lady." His manner was placid; he was enjoying the pleasure of a successful solution to an intricate problem. He repeated the resulting proposition again with greater emphasis for her benefit.

"I mean that if you could content yourself with mere activity, with bringing children into the world, and conducting charities and clubs, it would be foolish to attempt anything else. But having tried, — "

"And failed," Mrs. Wilbur interrupted sombrely.

"Having tried that so-called moral existence," Erard's voice was domineeringly emphatic, as if drilling a refractory pupil, "and found it incomplete, you will never

have doubts about the other occupation of cultivating and enjoying your wits."

Thus she had enrolled herself under his banner. There need be no further talk about the matter. They sauntered away from the Holbein room into the Long Gallery. In the dim distance where the perspective lines of the picture-covered walls converge, the usual conglomerate public was passing to and fro. A party of Americans was being "put through the Louvre in three hours." As Erard and his companion skirted the huddling mob of apathetic men and disturbed women, they could hear the cicerone shouting: "Ladies and shentlemen, this is a Teetian, one of the ten greatest pictures in the world. It is valued at one hundred fifty tousand dollar." Thereupon the mob swayed, from the common impulse to look in one direction; then the voice of the conductor shouted again: "This is by Rubens, the great Flemish painter; the third lady at the right is a picture of his wife." The bit of personality seemed also to arouse the languor of the herd; but in a moment the set look of vacant wonder settled over the faces once more.

"Thus," commented Erard, "the run of the world take life. They hear a collection of names and a piece of gossip; and they look and pass on."

Mrs. Wilbur thought that something might be said on the other side, at least for the intermediate people, but she accepted easily once more Erard's oracular position. He had not forced her to join the connoisseurs of life; indeed, four years ago, he had advised her to become one of the herd.

They looked casually at one or two more pictures, Erard, to his disciple's surprise, delivering new opinions quite contrary to those she had imbibed four years ago. All his criticism tended now towards psychology; it was a process of explaining *why* the human animal enjoyed, not a means of making him enjoy more completely with sympathetic enthusiasm. She reflected that Erard had been writing and publishing and had theories to maintain. In a general way she felt that he was less the artist, the sympathizer and creator, and more the pedant. He laughed at her tremulous excitement over pictures, and in a few minutes the ecstasy she had felt more or less ever since that first morning by the Arno evaporated. She saw that her talk was gush, and was ashamed. He made her feel that fine-art was only a wonderful trick, like the conjurer's devices, to be cleverly detected and classified. He pawed a picture, figuratively, as M. Berthelot might paw a human animal in measuring its abnormality.

"Well," he said at last, "it must be time for déjeuner. I have to look over some pictures at three. I have a commission to execute for a Chicago family. Don't you want to see some fine Monets?"

She felt humiliated in his eyes when she said, "Yes, but I can't ask you to lunch with me. I am alone at my hotel."

He shot a quick glance at her. She hadn't sloughed off the small prejudices yet. "We can go to a restaurant on the rue de Rivoli — that will be on the way."

As they left the Salon Carré he pointed out a Frenchwoman who was passing on the arm of an elderly man.

"That is the famous Claire Desmond. She was for years Dampière's mistress. He picked her up in Brittany and used her as his model until she grew to be impossible. She is a character in the *Quartier*." He went on to relate one or two anecdotes of the picturesque Claire.

Though Mrs. Wilbur thought herself far from prudish, her notions of good breeding were evidently out of place in the new life her companion was showing her. Erard was not coarse by nature, but in the *milieu* he had cultivated, the amatory passages of his neighbours had their passing interest. Art was intimately influenced by sex: indeed, in his extravagant moods, Erard was inclined to attribute all art effort to the sexual instincts. He suspected Mrs. Wilbur of having provincial prejudices about naked speech that needed correction; for he did not propose to change his habitual expression to suit the squeamishness of a constant companion.

They gained the hall, and paused before the Botticelli frescoes. Then Mrs. Wilbur turned and swept haughtily down the stone stairs, lingering for a minute before the rushing Victory. Such art was naked as men were naked in the childhood of the race. That state of simplicity could never come again. The nakedness of Erard seemed to her like impotent curiosity.

She might come to accept this attitude, also, and see no mystery in man and woman more than the mystery of two sensual animals. But she shuddered at the idea. That would strip the world of one necessary covering for its sordidness. She looked up at the noble Victory, feeling the

form of the goddess through the garment of stone. Then she glanced at Erard, who was waiting for her at the end of the staircase. She was not willing that *that* male, with his little unshapen body, should discuss sex, — a part of her which she shared with the goddess above, — in his disillusioned manner.

CHAPTER III

THE déjeuner put them in accord, however. A bottle of good wine brought out evidences of human comradeship in Erard. He talked over his winter's work, in which he assumed her coöperation. He made her take her notebook and jot down titles and references, laughing at her heedless reading. She was to make the drawings of architectural details for the new book. Then they discussed several excursions, one especially to a chateau near Orleans where there were said to be some Leonardo drawings. As they walked down the avenue to the picture dealer's, Mrs. Wilbur was surprised to find how far she had gone. It had not been possible to parley with Erard; he had taken everything for granted.

They passed the Opera House. She remembered the night when Wilbur had carried her off her feet with his plans for making a fortune. That emotion seemed quite dead now; she was thankful to escape so cheaply. Dear Uncle Sebastian had made it possible for her to become a privateer once more, — to take the step in a queenly fashion without haggling. She blessed him for enabling her to trip lightly whither she would.

At last Erard's talk and her musings ceased at the door of the dealer. Once inside the portières which closed the little gallery, Mrs. Wilbur noticed with a

shock of surprise three familiar faces; there were the Mills — father, mother, and daughter. Erard had said nothing about meeting these Chicago patrons of art in the gallery. Perhaps he had neglected to mention the fact through pure indifference; perhaps he had a subtler reason for not warning her.

Mrs. Wilbur advanced timidly, angry at herself for her lack of ease. It was the first time she had actually met any of her old acquaintances since her rupture with her husband. Recovering her self-command quickly, she determined to take the matter in her old aggressive, imposing style. She bowed stiffly, and spoke. Evidently the Mills were disconcerted on their side. The father turned away awkwardly, as if suddenly interested in a small canvas in the corner. Mrs. Mills bowed coldly and advanced to receive Erard with emphatic cordiality. The daughter, putting her lorgnette affectedly to her eyes, swept the room, including Mrs. Wilbur, in a gross stare. Then suddenly perceiving Erard, she brushed past Mrs. Wilbur without a look, and stood beside her mother.

Mrs. Wilbur was stung by the snub. These Mills were good, plain people — he had been one of Remsen's junior partners — who had only lately had money. She had rather patronized them in Chicago, especially the daughter, whom she had entertained several times. They had built a house a mile above the Wilburs and in the Chicago sense they were close neighbours. Evidently her case was judged in Chicago, and had gone against her by default. Her character was now the property of such people as the Mills, who could take the

position of guardians of society! She walked about the little room with as much indifference and composure as she could assume. She would have liked to flee, but pride held her there in her discomfiture. Erard, she thought, was watching her curiously, all the time talking lightly with Miss Mills. Had he set this trap for her, — the cad! and was he now amusing himself with watching her emotions? Or did he wish to give her an object-lesson in the term "burning your ships"?

The dealer appeared at last, and suggested that the party should enter his private room where the pictures in question were assembled. The Mills followed the dealer, passing directly in front of Mrs. Wilbur without noticing her presence. Mr. Mills did the act clumsily; his wife severely; the daughter airily.

"Won't you come with us, Mrs. Wilbur?" Erard paused to ask.

"Thank you, no. I find enough to interest me here," she managed to reply.

Erard shrugged his shoulders as if to say, "You should have calculated the cost of all this beforehand. No use to get into a temper about it *now*." He tiptoed after his patrons.

She thought that she had calculated all the costs, and although the actual experience was more brutal than the imagined, she tried to think that she cared little for the snub itself. But she had meant to be discreet, and now she knew that in ten days Chicago gossips would have a pointed corroboration of their surmises.

She would like to go up to this good Mr. Mills and

say, "I am not this Erard's mistress; indeed I am not low enough for that!"

Then she smiled at herself, and stilled her tumultuous feelings, pretending to examine a greenish-red Regnoir that was propped against the wall. One doesn't cut a straight path to freedom, she reflected, without paying for it.

Secretly she longed to sneak out of the place before they returned. It caused her such a thumping at the heart to go through with even this ordeal, trifling as it was. But how could she face Erard, if she confessed to a consciousness of all the implications? Yet when she heard Mr. Mills's honest voice, — "Well, Marthy, seven thousand dollars is a good deal to pay for that red and yellow haystack," — and Mrs. Mills's doubtful tones, "But Mr. Erard considers it a paying investment," — then Miss Mills's higher notes: "Oh, pa, you mustn't look at it that way; Monet is making a great stir now; Mrs. Stevans has three of his. We must have at least *one*, and some Pizarros, and a lovely red Regnoir," — Mrs. Wilbur fled into a little side cabinet, pressing herself closely into the recess made by the portières. She could see the women dart questioning glances about the empty room, as if expecting to find their victim again. Presently they crossed the gallery and disappeared, Erard following them and caressing each temperament with the suitable argument. After all, she might as well have fled before as to sneak into a corner this way. Erard would think she had given in, and might drive off with the Mills.

When she had given them time enough to get away she walked towards the entrance and met Erard, who was evidently returning for her. He had divined her ruse, and that was worse than all.

"I thought you knew the Mills?" he remarked coolly, as they turned into the crowded boulevards. Mrs. Wilbur hated him violently for one moment. If there were only one phrase which would express contempt, disgust, despair — everything!

"I have met them," she forced herself to answer indifferently.

"Simple people; quite a comedy," Erard observed. "Shall we walk up the Champs Elysées? This sunset will be splendid from the arch."

She walked on in silence at his side for some minutes. The little Paris world was out to enjoy the good moments of November sunlight, gaily forgetful of all the shivering it had endured since the last public appearance of the sun. At the great *brasseries* along the boulevards men and women were seated before their untasted *bock* or *café*, luxuriating in the popular street theatre that could be had for a few sous. Some men with silk hats pushed back on their heads were scribbling letters or journalistic copy, in the casual fashion of Parisian life. There were other little groups of twos, a man and a woman, one of the two generally talking earnestly, while the other listened dumbly. In a way Mrs. Wilbur felt that she and Simeon Erard ought to be seated at such a table, bound together as they were by some kind of a tie. Perhaps the time would come when she should

be besieging him over a *bock* on the boulevard, in low, concentrated words.

"Why did you omit to tell me who was to be at the dealer's?" she said at last, her resentment having cooled.

"It didn't occur to me," Erard replied with assurance, "and if it had, I shouldn't have considered it a matter of enough importance to mention. It was an affair of business for me, an affair of interest and instruction for you. Not a social matter, it seems to me."

He gave no more attention to her ruffled feelings, and began to talk about what was being done at the studios; the movements in impressionism since her last visit in Paris; the last two salons and the Glasgow school; a new dealer in Dutch and Belgian pictures. He talked well, too glibly in fact, as if he had got into the habit of talking and writing for publication. His conversation, however, was well calculated to soothe any irritability that might be left. She was so eagerly interested in the new ventures in art, that she could not harbour personal pique, especially against the man who roused her mind.

They came out on the Place de la Concorde, which was brilliant in the last light from the west. To Mrs. Wilbur this spot was always an inspiriting sight. As they turned into the broad avenue, where the rush of carriages, the labouring omnibuses slowly toiling up the slippery ascent, filled the vast roadway with life, the human side of Paris burst upon her. It was also a stupendous human machine like Chicago, but somehow

vital and vitalizing. It was not grotesque. Once again she was in the current she desired for herself, a current of thoughts, emotions, and theories where the world's ideal imagery was the essential interest.

Yet something was different in her at the end of this day from the beginning. She was not so sure of herself, so clearly removed from the entangling passions of humanity. She should have been capable of a more lasting resentment. Erard was training her in toleration too fast, and she shrunk from the logical conclusions of the course she had somehow committed herself to. He was not quite master yet. This suspicion of coming degradation, of gradual lapse from her haughty self, troubled her momentarily, and rendered her silent and depressed.

Erard wisely left Mrs. Wilbur to herself for the rest of the week. They had arranged to make the Orleans excursion on the following Sunday. On that expedition a series of petty accidents delayed them until by the time they reached the chateau the sun was already behind the forest-trees. The chateau was full of interesting bric-à-brac, which detained them until the fading light necessitated an immediate examination of the drawings they had come to see. The three yellow sheets were laid reverently upon a green-baize table by the custodian, who hovered near, suspicious of Erard's irreverent familiarity with the sacred bits of paper.

Erard looked at them hastily, then squatting his elbows on the table, examined each one with a glass, line by line, and lastly, holding the drawing to the light

noted the signature. "Impudent forgeries," he muttered at last. Mrs. Wilbur glanced at the faded drawings blankly. "They are called Leonardo, and some one has copied his signature pretty accurately. I didn't believe they could be authentic, but I supposed they were of the school at least. See here," he said, instructing his companion, "you can tell by the fingers — they are roughly finished or rather entirely unfinished. The next time you are in the Louvre, look at his drawings, and see how exquisitely each finger is done. That is enough to show they aren't authentic. But if you want more confirmation, look at the ears —"

Mrs. Wilbur studied the drawings attentively, at a loss to see the deep significance of Erard's rapid remarks. At last Erard threw down the sheets carelessly, and handing the custodian his fee, sauntered towards the entrance. When they reached the gardens he observed casually, "There's a gate here somewhere, worth seeing, Moorish they call it."

By the time they had found the bit of Moorish building encased in the Gothic, it was twilight, and as they proceeded to their carriage, Mrs. Wilbur bethought herself of the distance they were from Paris.

"Is there an express train?" she asked, hastening her steps.

Erard looked at his watch. "The *rapide* at midnight," he replied. "I had no idea we should take so long in the chateau!"

"Is there no other train?"

Erard shook his head. "And we can't take the *rapide*.

It's beastly getting into Paris at four A.M. There's a good hotel at this end of the town, and to-morrow we can take an early train and see Châtres on our way home."

He spoke unconcernedly, as if on the whole fate had arranged well for them. Mrs. Wilbur still walked on hastily, annoyed at her own carelessness, and perplexed. As they reached the entrance, she said, coldly, — "I think I had best take the *rapide*. We can go to the hotel and dine, and then I can wait at the station. Perhaps they will telegraph for a compartment for me."

Erard looked at her quizzically. "As you like, but — we shall have a good many expeditions to make sooner or later, and you can't often manage to return the same day — "

She made no reply, suspecting that whatever she might say would seem foolish and prudish to Erard. It distressed her that she should be caught again so quickly in these petty matters of personal propriety. Yet to insist upon making a disagreeable night for herself by taking the *rapide* seemed also foolish, as if she made too much altogether of convention. And if she did not yield now to Erard's mode of life, he would force her to it in his own good time. The only alternative would be to break with him entirely; she could not make that sacrifice.

The midnight journey grew more distasteful to her than ever, once in the old hotel, with the kindly hostess bustling in and out, arranging a fire, and making preparations for a comfortable dinner. As they came to the

fruit and nuts after a rich, *bourgeois* meal, she made up her mind to accept the position and get the fun of it.

"You can find another hotel easily, I don't doubt," Mrs. Wilbur remarked tentatively. "For I think I shall have madame warm a chamber for me—"

Erard shrugged his shoulders and smiled. "Very well, as you wish."

"As long as I remain Mrs. Wilbur," she blushed quickly, "I think I can't be *quite* another 'good fellow.' I have some obligations to do the silly things other people do."

They had no further talk about the matter. Erard had practically won his point; she knew it, and after he had left her before the dying wood-fire, she sat rather despondent in the gloom of the deserted salon. She did not wish to make loneliness and isolation for herself in her efforts to be free, and she was not prepared to discard altogether the observances of conventional society.

To be sure, Erard was not like other men, she comforted herself with reflecting. One could have an entirely neutral, passionless intercourse with him. He was solely concerned with ideas and impressions, and considered persons about as much as the traveller does the furnishing of his lodging. They were either suitable for his convenience or not, and his interest did not extend beyond the limited use he put them to. When she betook herself to the dusty, unused room with its spacious curtained four-poster and creaking board-floor, her mind still

occupied itself with Erard. Was she satisfied to have him so neutral? If he had been an impulsive, passionate man, — if he had taken his inspiration from the suffering she had undergone at the picture-dealer's and had demanded — well, more than discipleship, he might have had it. She was not mere intellect, far from it!

She lay awake in the still room pondering that wilful fancy. If he had forgotten nothing, extenuated nothing, counselled nothing; if he had plead for the greatest love that she was capable of giving, he might have been — her heart fluttered at the wild idea — master for a long day. Some little solvent would touch the story of their lives, and transmute the relationship. For there are times when it is better to carry a place by storm than by slow siege. How foolish! He was Erard, and it was absurd to consider him sentimentally.

When Erard called for Mrs. Wilbur the next morning, he found her in the *patronne's cabinet*, chatting vivaciously. The morning was superb, inviting them to a prowl in the city. After déjeuner they took the train for Châtres. One thing suggested another, these beautiful days of the second autumn, and it was late Wednesday night before Erard left Mrs. Wilbur at her hotel on the Quai. When she entered her salon she found Molly Parker sitting forlornly before the grate.

"Where have you been, Adela? I got in last night," Molly exclaimed reproachfully.

"I have been — out of the city," Mrs. Wilbur replied evasively.

"Not with Erard and alone!" Molly's mobile face showed quick alarm.

"Yes," her friend replied stonily, "with Mr. Erard and alone."

They sat looking at one another, afraid to strike the new note. The next day Mrs. Wilbur and her friend left for the villa on Bello Sguardo.

CHAPTER IV

"We are prominent members of the Art Endeavour Circle," Miss Parker wrote Thornton Jennings, after a month in the Villa Rosadina. "I may say that we have a salon for the young Genius. Erard has surrounded us with a lot of little Erards. There is Salters. He is a distinguished-looking young American with an easy income and leanings towards art. He copies Erard, picks up his ideas from the one source of pure criticism — at least Erard says so, — and then dilutes them. Even if Mr. Salters is a little 'short' of ideas, he is very nice and entertaining.

"To pass over a shabby artist who has quarrelled with his wife and can't sell his pictures, and the Gorgon (she's Vivian Vavasour and is as sour as her articles are sweetly wordy), we come to Mary Eleanor Bradley, the last enrolment. She is a young woman, rather portly, with a puffy face and flaxen hair, who speaks very intensely and slowly and talks all the time. She comes from a good family in Philadelphia and has been in some college or other. She made up her mind that the only way to see Europe was to come over alone and 'be Bohemian.' But she hasn't found it much fun so far; she is trying desperately to hook on to our procession. Erard says nay. Her great feat was a tour in Lombardy with Erard, *sans* chaperone,

for six days. Mr. Erard says she asked him, and he couldn't refuse a lady. Then, horrid man! he smiles and says no man needs a chaperone with Miss Bradley except for self-protection. *She* says it was quite romantic, and 'you couldn't do it with a man — well, who was in good society.' She talks a lot about it; the excursion makes her reputation in the Art Endeavour Circle.

"This Miss Bradley isn't half so bad as she sounds. I believe she is nice enough when she is kept under restraint. She treats me as an amiable simpleton, and we get on splendidly. If she escapes soon enough from the Circle she will probably settle down and marry some nice little man who won't let her cross the street alone after five in the evening.

"Besides these parasites who drink tea and take up our time in this dear Florence, Erard brings us better material sometimes — young French poets and journalists, a Jew critic on a London paper — cosmopolitan celebrities just budding. I have almost forgotten little Mr. Anthon, Adela's younger brother. He came on from Paris last week. He doesn't approve of Adela and thinks I should lecture her.

"He doesn't know that I am tolerated only on my good behaviour and non-interference. Erard is master now. We came here to be awfully free and do as we liked, but we have to work hard at drawing and reading and taking notes for the master. You ought to see your regal Mrs. Wilbur getting up at eight every morning in order to finish her tasks and have some time for the galleries. Erard has a most useful assistant, all

for nothing. For, you know, it isn't painting now, — that is cheap, but it's ideas about painting — 'prehensile values,' the 'folly of humanism,' the 'receptivity of the sensorium,' and the 'psychology of colour.' We are engaged in dissecting art and in stewing the remains up into little dishes. One big dish the cooks are busy over now, and they are planning to go to Rome to put in the flavouring. I must be good, or I shan't be invited. For they go off 'for business' quite by themselves, and aren't bothered by conventionalities. They got 'way beyond what people say or think,— long ago.

"Sometimes it is dreary enough, this talk; it sounds like so much gibberish. Last Sunday they invited me to go to Prato with them, out of pure kindness. Erard got started on 'the critic's function,' and we listened. He said that well-informed people all thought alike on art, and the real judges (those who had cultivated their sensoriums and had good sensoriums) always agreed about any object of art. Then when we came out atop of a hill before a lovely valley with a road winding through it, he began to experiment on us. He asked us *where* we *felt* the road. I said in my eyes, but Mrs. Wilbur gave the correct answer, — in the muscles of the forearm; then, as it mounted the hills beyond, in the muscles of the legs. They tightened up sympathetically when you looked hard enough. 'Now,' Mr. Erard said, 'that's the way the artist makes you feel when you see the road he paints.' Some one told me that the psychology business Erard picked up from Prudler, the young psychologist at Bonn, whom he met in Switzerland two

years ago, just as the measuring toes and ears, and all that, was taken from an old Italian. I don't know; they all seem much bothered about the original source of ideas. Erard accuses the Gorgon of living on *him*, intellectually, and others say they both live on Symonds.

"Heigho! it's a queer world, this, — but it is dreadfully like Chicago in some respects. I wonder where it will all end. This lovely Florence, how sweet it would be without the Art Endeavourers! My pals are old Luisa, our protecting house-saint, and the *contadina* who helps her, little Pinetta."

Molly Parker's jocular account of her friend's doings was not exaggerated. Mrs. Wilbur had found the work suggested for her by Erard ready at hand and more and more engrossing. Whither it led she did not trouble herself about, any more than she speculated on the probable outcome of her present manner of life. Erard himself had come down to Italy when the winter was well on, and though he flitted up and down the peninsula on one errand or another, his centre of operations was Florence. There he had established himself, in a suite of rooms on the Piazza San Spirito, where the sun lay for long hours, — as usual, in the one completely suitable environment. Even Molly Parker could not find fault with his taking up his abode just there within a ten minutes' rapid walk to the Villa Rosadina, nor with his frequent visits, which never seemed aimless. Yet she felt that his grasp on their actions grew firmer as the weeks passed: "we think Erard and feel Erard!"

A slight diversion was created by Walter Anthon's

arrival. His "serious news" to the effect that "*he* intends to apply for a divorce," was received indifferently by his haughty sister. Young Walter had hoped to arrange diplomatically a "modus vivendi"; indeed the family had deputed him to bring his sister back to St. Louis. Mrs. Wilbur laughed at his solemnity. She even went so far as to say that it pleased her to know "Mr. Wilbur wishes a divorce. That means he has recovered from his blow, consoled himself. It has come so quickly that I doubt if he would be willing to make any other arrangements." She had in mind the ample Mrs. Stevans. "If he has consoled himself he will get rid of me sooner or later. And it will be easier for him to get rid of me if I remain away. I can do that for him at least." Nor would she be moved about her property. "I gave that to him long ago. I certainly hope he won't give it up. He is right-minded and might have foolish scruples, but I shall do what I can to have him keep it."

"The shocking scandal of it!" young Anthon moaned to Molly Parker. "Running off this way with Erard."

"And with me, you forget. I hold the social smelling-salts."

"Does she mean to marry him?"

"Perhaps Erard doesn't believe in marriage. This arrangement saves him from any matrimonial monotony."

"Can't you take a stand, and bring her to her senses?"

"I am no good at evangelizing," Miss Parker replied forlornly. "Adela must have a woman around to say commonplace things to when she's on a strain. That's all the good I am. She hasn't had enough of the Erard

dose yet. We'll have to wait. There she goes now with the little Brown Rat." They could see from the terrace where they were talking a cab rolling down the serpentine curves of the hill.

"Off to get a new sensation. Remember all your nagging is just fuel for the fire. She doesn't, well, care for you, and anything you don't want her to do must seem particularly nice."

So the diplomat returned unsuccessful to his London rooms and advised the family to get what they could out of Wilbur without stirring Adela up.

Yet her brother's news had affected her. Erard noted that she was *difficile* that afternoon. They had driven over to Santa Croce to examine a bit of sculpture in one of the chapels. The chill of the church or her own meditations depressed Mrs. Wilbur. Then Erard's cold little epigrams about art were irritating. The precious intoxication of that first long look on beauty had faded rapidly. Erard had taught her to be ashamed of such savage satisfaction; but groping after the masculine play of intellect was painful. Yet her career was marked out for her: she was to be "a discriminator of fine pleasures." Moments of regret, however, and of disappointment as to-day, intervened, when even the most pitiful creative effort seemed greater than profound discernment. Erard scoffingly said that when she had these moods she was trying to see "the beyond."

She left the church abruptly, preferring the placid sunny square where little children were playing, to the damp church and the high function of criticism. She

could not send her companion away; so the two strolled aimlessly through the stone passages, echoing faintly with half-frozen life, out to the bright river bank. Even the brilliant sunshine of the February sky gave no comforting warmth. Erard said the sun appeared for the effect only. The Arno, too, flowed muddy and sullen, sweeping débris down from old mountain villages. The elements of royal splendour, to which she had once responded tremulously, lay before her eye, but she was not stirred. She thought.

Later, when they were drinking their tea in the villa, Mrs. Wilbur let fall the thoughts simmering in her mind. Erard was doctoring one of her architectural sketches, while she watched his skilful hand.

"A lot of your things seemed to me so promising," she mused.

"'Promising' — disgusting word," Erard snapped. "Youth, a few years between puberty and manhood, is filled with deceptive lights, which are taken often for true fires. The period of physical eruption past, the lights fade from the mental horizon; the ambitious, imaginative youth, if he has anything in him, becomes a scholar or a dilettante."

Mrs. Wilbur moved uncomfortably. What her woman's soul hated to feel was that Erard's specifically original and creative powers had never been great and were fated to decline steadily, growing each year more colourless. It was a slow, inevitable process which he was powerless to arrest.

"It's childish to think there is any spiritual mystery

in the toy," Erard continued. "The world, too, has grown from puberty to a staid maturity where it cares first for a fact. In hours of relaxation, it sighs for the dream of its unsettled years; but give it a poet and it laughs at his boyishness — until he is dead."

"That is hateful," she flung these words into the crackling fire which lighted the lofty room sombrely.

"Only because you invest the artist with a romantic halo," Erard insisted. "I have found my work absorbing and fruitful. I have been successful in it, and am encouraged to prosecute my ideas and publish the results. It makes little difference by what wicket-gate we approach the field: the problems are the same. And the greatest note of our day is *creative criticism*," he rose authoritatively at these words, — a phrase which was frequently on his lips. "Your artist should be busy over his technique. So far as intellect goes, he is often a dumb beast. *We* deal with ideas. We extract the ideas, press out the sensations peculiar to his art, and we are officiating priests between him and the mob."

Mrs. Wilbur remained silent, unappeased, and opening the piano she struck a few chords, drawing out a kind of sad, tinkling music.

Ah! there was a difference between great criticism and even puny art. If not in the usefulness of the work, in the man behind the imagined work, and the soul to whom he spoke! There *was* a halo about the creator of new notes of loveliness. She had been fired by the picture of a man struggling with adversity for the chance

to announce himself, thrusting himself with Napoleonic egotism towards his great work that should justify him and his disciples before the world. But — little text-books on art, essays, reviews, even this book which was to make a sensation from Berlin to Chicago — that was hardly a justification. Others did as much without all this stress and strain. And even if not done, the world went on quite wise enough without a little more talk about European culture.

"It *is* greater to create than to comprehend," she spoke out, above the tinkle of the old piano, urged by some reproach in her soul. "We are all blind, blind in this weary world, and we are groping for the gods who deny themselves to us. It is *great* to see beyond, to know the gods even faintly, and to appease the hunger of others. More than that it is *man's* great act, the revealing of himself before the Master, his prayer to God who has made him with appetites and passions, and has made him with the longing to see and the power to dream. That has—" She paused, shrinking from completing her thought — "brought me here and made me low."

She closed the piano, and walked rapidly up and down the room. Suddenly she lit a candle and motioned Erard to follow her into an adjoining lumber-room. He looked about disgustedly at the dusty room, the neglected canvases. In one corner stood an easel, and on it, unframed, his picture of Adela Anthon, which with coarse irony Wilbur had recently sent to her bankers. They looked at the face, Mrs. Wilbur holding the candle above their heads.

"I couldn't do that now," Erard admitted, squinting at the picture critically.

"No!" Mrs. Wilbur assented decisively. "And *that*," she spoke fiercely, "the power behind that picture mastered me, deluded me — it is sad — defeat —"

A flare of wind blew out the light.

"You are wrong," Erard checked her calmly, "and foolish. The power is still mine, and —"

He moved as if to touch her. She walked absently past him into the firelight, and placing the candle unlit on the table, sank into a chair.

"Yes, I suppose so," she answered listlessly, burying her gaze again in the fire.

Erard watched her savouringly, exactly conscious of her beauty and her power. She was to be *his* in due and proper season. To-night she had stirred his sluggish senses, much as a superb actress might impose herself, at one remove.

CHAPTER V

Mrs. Wilbur's disappointment rarely expressed itself in words. She worked with seeming interest at the tasks Erard suggested, and at odd times furbished her Latin or read Italian. The grey silver olives about the villa turned to a delicate green; the drab earth yielded to flowers. Each week the sun lay longer on the terrace above the city walls, until at last in early April a blast of heat declared the winter had passed. From time to time Mrs. Wilbur had accompanied Erard in his flittings, and the last of April Molly Parker joined them on an expedition towards Rome, which she described as "a triumphal procession in the cause of art and freedom."

Erard was apparently testing his power by carrying Mrs. Wilbur away in the face of society. He had finally hoodwinked the virtues through the person of this high-minded and beautiful woman. She should read to him when he was weary, write notes and examine records, make bibliographies and provide the drawings he had decided to use. She should talk and stir him up when he was dull, and above all she should admire him, bear incense, and fear his sharp tongue. That she was tall and impressive and interesting in person was all to his liking. It was pleasant to touch silk, to feel a softness and high-bred delicacy always about one. Even the

rapid, low speech which was characteristic of her, was suited to his needs. She never touched a nerve disagreeably, except when at rare intervals she lashed out wildly, and then she was like a play. Storm was also good to experience, if he could always still the waters.

John Wilbur had evidently followed his wife's actions pretty closely. Mrs. Stevans, who was travelling in Europe, had kept him informed, casually, and Erard had let her assume whenever they met all that her imagination could picture. In the meantime Wilbur had begun to prosecute his action for divorce vigorously. Mrs. Anthon had lived in the desolate house all these months, to maintain appearances, which deceived no one. Now her son-in-law informed her bluntly that she had best leave at once; he did not care any longer for her sympathy and "wanted his ruined home to himself."

Mrs. Wilbur in the course of her wanderings from place to place received the echoes of this final eruption which she had caused. The thought of it disturbed her more than she allowed herself to believe, even here in the midst of earnest regular work which was supposed to satisfy her mind. It would all be over soon, she said to herself, the divorce once granted, but she began to realize that she could not dispose of her unimportant self without making wounds not easily healed.

Mrs. Anthon added her irritant to her daughter's feelings in the shape of a tempestuous letter. She wrote on black-edged paper with some idea of symbolism in her mind. (To her intimate friends she had often said: "My daughter is dead to me.") This time

her wail was complex. "You have done what I always said you would do, Adela. You remember I said to Sebastian — 'Ada will disgrace us all some day, I know it, and with that low fellow you have picked up.' Now your husband is getting a divorce, which he oughtn't to do *yet*, and the house is just so beautiful and new and grand, — just made for you to look fine in. I have kept it the best I could, though those English men-servants are real insolent. I had rather have three or four good, clean-looking girls in caps and black gowns as the Remsens do. I suppose you are beyond a mother's tears and supplications, seeing as you have broken the sacredest laws of man and God. And you christened and took into the church. John would stick to the Episcopal church and have you all baptized when you were babies, though I wanted to go to the Presbyterian church, which you remember was just at the foot of the hill from us. I had a real kind letter from Mrs. King Hamilton about our trouble. She says the scandals in New York are awful, we don't know how bad people *can* be, when they haven't anything to do but be bad, and she can't see any more than the rest of us why you didn't have the taste for a more elevated man. Times are changing, I wrote her, not only in New York, but everywhere: it comes from educating the girls. I managed to live with your father twenty-five years. . . . John has been as nice as he always was, but silent and away most of the time. I took your best blue lamb's-wool blankets, those your sister Elsa gave you, you remember. And I'll give them back to her if you think best. They'll be just what

she wants, for your brother John has moved into a new house."

At this point Mrs. Wilbur dropped the letter impatiently, then laughed, and would have liked to cry. She had returned to her villa from Rome, the day before, and was sitting in the great salon, gazing out over the blue Val d'Arno, and in the intervals of her reverie reading a few of the letters she had found waiting for her. What would Molly say to the news of the divorce? and Erard? The latter was coming soon to take her for their usual afternoon walk. She tossed the letters on her desk and rang for tea. She wouldn't tell him about the divorce: he would find it out, as he learned most facts about her, by some swift, hidden means of intelligence.

Presently Erard entered the room briskly. Pouring his own tea, he went over by the window to drink it and eyed the landscape between the sips. He certainly had heard nothing about the divorce in his letters, for if he had, he would have watched her more keenly to read the effect in her face. She half suspected that he was waiting for the divorce to — she hardly knew what — to make his appropriation of her more legal. Hitherto he had behaved toward her very circumspectly, evidently not anxious to commit himself. And she had tried him in certain moods, tempting him to forget his caution.

"We will go out by Fiesole," he remarked at last, putting down his cup. "There is a lovely bit back of the village that will explain to you Leonardo's landscape."

For once Mrs. Wilbur was not inclined to continue this uninterrupted course in æsthetics. Her own situation perplexed her and rendered her irritable.

"Yes, but I am tired of running about," she answered peevishly.

He looked at her for the first time since entering the room.

"Oh! you shouldn't faint so soon. We must go again to Rome before it gets unbearably hot."

"And I must follow like a good child." She rose and stood by his side. "You *are* domineering, like most men. How long must I carry burdens?" She turned her heated face to him and looked as if she would say, "Why don't you — show that you are a man? Consider *me* for a moment as a woman. Wouldn't you like to love me? Do you think you could have me, the rejected Mrs. Wilbur? Try! It will give you an unexpected sensation. Come, you are pedantic, you play the schoolmaster overmuch."

"No one could call you a child," he smiled, sitting down below her on the window-sill.

"No, I am better than a child; I can help you make books, and when I am good-natured I amuse you and flatter you. You like flattery so much!"

Her eyes challenged him again. She was imperiously anxious to put him beside himself — and — to spurn him, perhaps.

"You have given me the keenest flattery; you have obeyed me."

"And if I disobey, and recant?"

"Oh, you won't do that," he answered tranquilly. "You are too intelligent to do anything so silly."

"Suppose I return to my husband and ask him to forgive me?"

Erard shrugged his shoulders.

"Don't be stupid and melodramatic. You ought to know by this time whether you like Wilbur well enough to live with him."

"Or prefer Erard," she retorted sarcastically. He looked at her, measuring her, enjoying her passion. "I have been such a good disciple, dear master," she continued tempestuously. "I have studied your gospel letter by letter."

"There are some chapters yet unperused," Erard smiled back, mockingly.

"In good time may your pupil go so far —"

"All in good time."

He baffled her, and after each period of stormy indulgence he left her lower in her own esteem. Whenever she gave herself free rein, she had a sickening sense of the futility of abandonment. She lost each time a little power.

"Now you had better let me show you some landscape, or will you pack your trunk for — Chicago?" He played with her mood tranquilly.

"I would like to — strike you!" In a moment she gave a little low laugh of scorn. "No, you really aren't worth tragic displays, Mr. Simeon Erard! Did you ever dream that there are some sensations beyond you?"

"For example?" he walked slowly towards her.

"For example," she looked down at him. She was now thoroughly reckless and maddened with a cold passion. Her arms, half opened, pressed convulsively together, slowly, involuntarily. Erard blanched, trembled, half moved, and then paused. She swept by him, frightened and aghast. For the first time in her life she was conscious of feebleness: she was not sure of herself.

CHAPTER VI

At that moment the door of the salon opened, and Jennings came forward into the firelight, with his fearlessly erect carriage, as if it were a fine thing to stride through the storms of the world. As Mrs. Wilbur shook hands with him she felt that his face might have been taken from some renaissance bust, so filled it was with the pure fire of life.

Jennings pulled awkwardly at his shrunken travelling coat of pepper and salt, and then perceiving Erard, extended a hand with a frank "How are you?" Mrs. Wilbur ordered candles and fresh tea, curiously pleased with his unexpected appearance, and relieved from the tension of unmotived feeling.

"I met Salters on the street," Jennings explained. "He told me where to find you. I just escaped from him a few minutes ago. He told me about something he was at work upon. Has he been writing?"

"He has laboured over my cast-off ideas for five years," Erard replied.

"Well," the newcomer said kindly, "he'll write a book some day, I suppose."

"God knows. It takes only pen, paper, and patience to make a book."

Mrs. Wilbur remembered the epigram: Erard had used it about Salters four years before.

"You fellows are slanging yourselves in the good old style," Jennings laughed, as if amused at the gibes of manikins. "And Vivian Vavasour, is she still a prophet with a terrific vocabulary?"

"She has devoured a folio a week for ten years, and put out a lot of drivel each six months. Having exhausted art and letters she is trying her hand on religion now and coquetting with her soul."

"You are a precious lot!" Jennings laughed again hilariously.

"We attract recruits." Here is a noteworthy example, he implied, whom I am disciplining.

"Yes," Jennings admitted, taking a cigarette from the tea-tray, and lighting it judiciously. "So I see. When I was over here last, the neophyte was an ingenuous youth, who was delving into his *ego*. He changed his opinions with the seasons. What became of him?"

"You mean Hiram Ernst. He recanted, having exhausted Europe, and is married now to a woman in Buffalo. He is practising law. He writes me bumptious letters every now and then."

"And there was a southern poet, a flabby, fat youth of Plutonic dreariness, who lived on Turkish coffee and cigarettes. He wrote ditties to the infernal gods and emitted hints of mysterious vices."

"He shut himself up in a villa at Amalfi with a volume of Petrarch, and has not been heard from since."

"There were the women, too," Jennings continued,

reminiscentially. "Edith Sevan, a golden-haired little Puritan with a temperament. She used to play pretty well when she wasn't overcome with emotion."

"Married," Erard replied, "and lost."

"The Honourable Miss Vantine was stunning, — the cigarette-smoking, whiskey-and-soda one. She looked like a poppy and swore like a mule-driver. The last time I heard of her she had forsaken cigarettes for cigars and had punched an impertinent cabby. She was — well — *tough*."

"Oh, she went off with a German painter and forgot to get married until it was too late. My dear fellow, you are really archaic. We have new constellations now: the lesser luminaries have winked and gone out."

"It's all the same," Jennings protested, throwing away his cigarette half-smoked. "I suppose the flies are a little thicker as our idle classes increase. We need a war, — or a pestilence."

Mrs. Wilbur winced at this banter about the "aspirants." The dilettanti, the exclamatory women like herself, came and went. Erard was strong enough to stay, fattened by the incense of the troop. At this pause in the conversation Molly Parker entered, and dropping her wraps with a little exclamation of delight, she sped to meet Jennings.

"*You* and *here!*" She looked into his face. "Oh! this is so nice. It's the best thing this winter, isn't it, Adela?" Mrs. Wilbur laughed, and Erard echoed her merriment disagreeably.

"But you aren't half glad enough to see us," she looked at the visitor reproachfully.

"Of course I am." Jennings was pulling at his suit confusedly. "Didn't I come round this way to get to London?"

"Well, I don't care anyway," Miss Parker beamed, "I am awfully glad you are here. I'll tell Luisa to make a *festa* for dinner."

Jennings was vague about his plans, when the women plied him with questions at dinner. He was on his way somewhere he admitted, — about to make a change. "They got tired of me in Chicago, and I was rather tired of them." He was also vague about seeing these friends again, for he said bluntly that he didn't care to meet Americans at present.

"Nasty remark that," Molly reflected lugubriously after his departure.

"It would be nice to see him often," Mrs. Wilbur admitted. "I wonder why he is so attractive. He can be very *gauche*. It must be because he makes such little account of *himself*. The world is all; life is all, no matter where he works or whom he meets. That firm hand will be put to the plough, and those frank eyes will consider seriously."

"That is very nicely said," observed Miss Parker slyly, "especially coming from one of your profession."

Mrs. Wilbur took up a volume hastily and began her reading.

"But I think we shall see him again," her companion continued, a slight smile creeping over the corners of her mouth.

"Why didn't you stay in Chicago and bring it about, Molly?" Mrs. Wilbur laid aside her book.

"Because I wanted to be with you."

"And Thornton Jennings believes in sacrifice."

"Adela!"

"It will make it all the more romantic to have him follow you to your missionary field and see you caring for the heathen."

Molly Parker's eyes filled with tears. "I couldn't be happy, and know that you were over here alone with this set."

Mrs. Wilbur was already ashamed of her ill-temper. Presently she reflected aloud, "So you ran the chances of losing him to—"

"You *can't* lose any one you love, who loves you. But it may take a dreadful time to have everything come right." She sighed. "Adela," she said with sudden daring. "Did you ever know that Erard had relatives? A father and brother; the brother has just died, Mr. Jennings told me—we knew them."

Mrs. Wilbur listened quietly until her friend stopped, afraid to continue.

"No! I don't know anything about Mr. Erard's family. But when he wants to tell me, he will, and until then they do not interest me."

Jennings seemed in no great haste to leave Florence. He would disappear for a few days, and when he turned up at the Villa Rosadina he had "merely been off for exercise." But large slices of the lingering sunny days

he spent with the two American women. Mrs. Wilbur was conscious that he was watching and studying her. He seemed as much interested in her as in Molly. Indeed they had rather most of the desultory talk on their rambles. Now and then Molly Parker interrupted them in a heated *tête-à-tête.*

"Another soulful talk, darn 'em," she would mutter. "Anyhow Adela has an awful heavy chin, and when she gets excited it is positively ugly." She had vague fears that Adela was capable of corrupting even Jennings: you never knew how foolish a man could be. So when at one of these ruffled moments Mrs. Wilbur called affectionately, — "Come here, Molly, and kiss me." Miss Parker shook her head jauntily. "I don't like being kissed." And fishing out a stray cigarette, she lit it mischievously.

"Molly!" Mrs. Wilbur exclaimed.

"Vivian Vavasour does it: that's why she is so dried up and sallow. Mr. Erard taught me. Every one smokes in the Circle." She turned to Jennings. "Adela is squeamish. Then she dislikes new habits."

Jennings laughed appreciatively.

"By the way, Adela, I am going to write Walter to come on next Easter and take me to Rome for the Carnival. That's the custom in the Circle," she explained to Jennings. "We take men instead of maids when we travel. It's lots nicer; you have some one to lug the bags and to run errands. Besides, it shocks people and makes you talked about."

Mrs. Wilbur looked at her scornfully, while Jennings

seemed to receive infinite amusement from the situation.

"And you must swear and say nasty things about your family and friends. I met an English girl at Vivian's the other day, who said she was dining with some people in London, and the daughter of the house remarked at the table before her father and mother, — 'Barr' — that's the girl's name — 'Barr, you must come next week when papa and mamma are in the country. We can have some talk then and not such a stupid time.'"

Jennings went away in a gale of laughter, and Miss Parker subsided into silence. Mrs. Wilbur was more hurt by her outbreak than she cared to admit. She realized, moreover, that some recognition was due her friend for her constant devotion. She remarked at last, magnanimously, —

"I think we must go north before long. I will ask Thornton Jennings to join us later, and I am sure you will be glad to see Walter."

"Thank you," Miss Parker replied with sweet coolness. "Please don't urge them — you know I think it's the men's business to do the urging."

"I have fallen pretty low, *n'est ce pas*, Molly?"

"I didn't say so."

"But I *have;* I couldn't go much lower, it seems to me at times."

"Have you made yourself happy?" Molly inquired serenely.

Mrs. Wilbur did not care to answer. Molly's incipient

jealousy hardly deserved attention. Her fears were groundless, for Jennings was merely watching the play out, and assisting the action in obtrusive ways. He had told Mrs. Wilbur that his cousin Mrs. Stevans had been in Florence earlier in the winter and that she and Erard were quite chummy. "Erard's buying her a carload of stuff." She inferred that Mrs. Stevans was the present deity who made Erard's course easy, and that Erard was even better informed about her own affairs than she herself. Yet Erard had never alluded to what he had learned from Mrs. Stevans.

One day, moreover, Jennings related the incident of Peter Erard and the old man on Halsted Street. "Peter was a stubborn beast," he explained. "He refused to be comforted. Yet he took his private's place in the line, like a man. And Peter had to join the dumb."

"You are fond of the dumb," Mrs. Wilbur said wistfully, neglecting to follow out the implications of the Erard tale.

"They are not picturesque, but—" And after a silence he told her of his own dilemma. He had received an offer of the headship of a southern training-school for negroes. He was trying now to settle the question of accepting it. Mrs. Wilbur refrained from commenting. She would like to say, "Go," but that word might sound strangely in her mouth.

In spite of all this influence which Jennings brought, the old life of work with Erard went on. She had no excuse for breaking with him, even though the hot June days sapped her strength, and his demands grew

burdensome. And she was afraid of him as well as curious to know what humiliation he had in store for her. What new corners in his nature had she to explore before the end came? Somehow it was in the air that this thing was to be fought out between them to an end. Each recognized the struggle and hesitated.

The Tuscan summer crept on apace over the hills. The leafy woods in the Cascine glowed in the sun; down the river a thin line of stately, flower-like trees threw pictures of an afternoon in the pools of the Arno. The nights on Bello Sguardo were like jewelled velvet. She waited, apathetically, for some sign, some impulse of readjustment.

CHAPTER VII

LATE in June Mrs. Wilbur and Erard went again to Rome with several other members of the Circle. There a gradual languor stupefied her will. The year with its multiform passions had scorched her, and she found herself feeble before the fierce heat, the parched season of Italy. Over her drawing her arm would relax, and she would gaze vacantly at the object before her, wondering where the beauty in it lay. Beauty, which she had worshipped so passionately had escaped her, was fleeing further every dead day, and behind the smile of creation which had roused her pulses, she was now feeling the dull, earthy matter. How could Erard find sensations in this pulverizing atmosphere! Dust, dust, — the pictures and frescos were crumbling in dust, and the hard white marble had died long ago: it was crumbling now, and the fragments were disintegrating. Behind her in the forum there was a mound of dead dust, and she and Erard were handling mould of a later date. It would all crumble some day, and lie baking in the hard sun, silent for centuries while the world trod it out for vulgar uses.

Yet she did not complain. She was ashamed to whimper now. The morning came when she could not drag herself out into the glare, and she lay numb in the stuffy room of the little Albergo Nero where Erard had

placed the party. One day something like a miracle occurred — a new infusion of will. Jennings appeared, and saying merely, "Come! you are worn out," brought her back to Florence like a sick child. There had been a scene with Erard, who scoffed at her indisposition, and scolded her for leaving him in the lurch. Jennings had repeated his compelling "Come." The two men had exchanged a few innuendoes, Erard betraying his gutter-blood, and Jennings preserving his ironical good-humour. She had not made a sign, until Jennings remarked softly. "So Freedom has come to this! In the last resort you must act."

The household on Bello Sguardo had received her as a prodigal, — Luisa with loud exclamations of joy, Pina with roses, and Molly with a kiss. Yet she knew that the end was not yet. Erard would not let her slip so simply, and in a way that humiliating retreat from Rome had left her more powerless than ever. While she waited Walter Anthon came with real news: the divorce had been granted in chambers. Or, in Walter's solemn words, —

"Your husband has taken the measure which society allows him. You are no longer Mrs. John Wilbur."

His sister turned her weary eyes on him.

"The mail would have sufficed to tell me. Have you come all the way from London to preach me a sermon?"

He had not been so simple. He had a plan as usual.

"You are free now. I suppose that will please you, even if your husband that was, has made off with your money and is about to marry again."

The three ideas in this pungent little speech sank into her mind one after the other. She was free. How she had agonized over that! And how little it meant to be free, now that the courts had declared it to society! The creases in her mind could not be ironed out by any judge's decree. When she realized the next step, she remarked hastily, "He has taken only what I gave him."

"Are you willing to give him your father's money to enjoy with another woman?"

She had had a vague idea that in giving up her original fortune to her husband she was atoning in part for breaking the contract of partnership. It seemed, however, that he had sought and obtained his own satisfaction, and that her sacrifice was useless.

"He will do what is right," she protested.

"Do you think this Mrs. Stevans will let him give up what he has got his hands on?"

At the mention of this name her mind swept swiftly back to Chicago, to the night of the reception when the new house was opened. She had introduced Mrs. Stevans to Erard, and Erard had had a good deal to do with her ever since. Singular freak of fate that Erard should be connected with the two women in whom this man of business had sought happiness! Perhaps something would come out later, between *these* two, and a second scandal follow. She played with her morbid fancy.

"Now, *ma chère sœur*," Anthon resumed, attempting the difficult passage with a light touch, "you have had your fling in the world like the best of us, and have

shown your heels rather freely. Don't you think it's time to take in sail and make some port?" He could not hit upon quite the right figure. "In other words, consolidate the present position which you have chosen to create." No phrase seemed delicate enough for the business. But his sister helped him out.

"You mean you would like to have me induce Mr. Erard to marry me?"

Her brother nodded. She laughed a long, low, relishing laugh. "So this is the decision of the family. I am to marry the villanous Erard at last!" She laughed again shrilly.

"Yes," Anthon pursued, discomfited. "That's the only thing to do now for all parties, for Erard's sake as well as your own. He is a very clever fellow, and I have no doubt in time we can get him some respectable place. He will make his niche in the world. I am told that he is very strong in his line. But you probably know that as well as I.

"Of course," he continued, as Mrs. Wilbur seemed occupied with her own thoughts, "you would have to observe the *convenances* for a time, live over here very quietly and not appear publicly in America or London."

"And suppose I have no wish to marry Mr. Simeon Erard?" his sister asked at length.

"Not marry him!" Anthon gasped. "Good Lord, Adela, what do you mean? You haven't any objection to marriage in itself, — and when it's to save your reputation."

Mrs. Wilbur reddened at the concluding phrase.

"You didn't think that it would require any urging to make a woman who is compromised accept the honourable position of wife?"

"Don't speak so shockingly, pray."

"But you are wrong, dear Walter," she gave a sarcastic laugh. "There is really no illegal relation between us — pray don't squirm at *words*. There was a time when the outcome might have been different. But now that you have planned it all nicely, I am sorry that I cannot please you. Marriage with Mr. Erard at present does not really seem to me so possible."

This attitude mystified the young man; he caught on the words "at present."

"Oh, take your own time, Adela. Satisfy your own prejudices. But don't let this opportunity escape, — of squaring yourself with the world."

He sat back in his chair, satisfied that he had put his case well and had the logic of events on his side. He would teach this irrepressible sister that he knew what he was about, after all. Mrs. Wilbur opened her lips to retort; then lay back in her chair. At last she turned towards him as if her mind had come back to an errand-boy who was waiting for his message.

"Walter, you are young enough to learn a lesson and profit by it, if you care to. Don't meddle. Especially in what are courteously called affairs of the heart. Good people think they are courageous when they say unpleasant things, and try to run the universe their way. It is a blunder, and mere vanity on their part. You have bustled about over me ever since I came from America,

and you haven't the excuse for your impertinence of any great affection. You are a vain young man, and you are weak. You are pretty to look at, and you have good manners — when you are properly subdued. No! listen, for this is the last time you are likely to hear what is good for you. I am willing to believe that you are clever, though a list of brilliant acquaintances and a post in London journalism are really not great heights to reach. You are a little man, Walter, an amiable little man, and that is why the big world tolerates you. But you mustn't become didactic! Now run in and ask Pina to bring tea out on the terrace and to call Miss Parker and Mr. Jennings, if they're at home."

A good deal of the romance of his mission was reft from Walter Anthon by this incisive lecture. So far his diplomacy and tact had ended in his being corrected like a small boy, and sent into the house to order tea. He went, however, without further words, resolving to bring up his plan at another time, when his beautiful sister was more amenable to reason.

The sight of Miss Parker comforted him. She was so *seduisante*, he confided to her, in a summer dress, pouring tea under the lemon blossoms, while she inquired tenderly after all his little interests. She had the feminine art his grand sister so brutally lacked, of keeping in mind all your personal affairs. It was adroitly flattering to mention his article in the April *Book-Grower*, and to discuss the *éclatant* cynicism with which he had flourished into his peroration. Finally, perceiving that Mrs. Wilbur was preoccupied, she had suggested taking him for a walk in

the cool of the evening. There was a view behind the hill into a side valley that was especially fine in this light. Then she had some errands for the household; he could exercise his Italian. It was all so daintily, so coquettishly managed, Anthon thought with complacency. No London girl could rub you just the right way like that. It was delicious to feel yourself falling into such toils. But she would have to make them strong! If folly were to be his lot, it must be a long-drawn-out, sweet folly.

After they had left, Mrs. Wilbur lay quite still in her large wicker chair, watching the pale silver plain at her feet shimmer in the blinding flood of light from the western hills. The sea of heat seething in myriad lanes above the trees hypnotized her flickering will. Why had she rejected her brother's plan for her salvation?

CHAPTER VIII

SHE lay there motionless on the terrace into the still twilight. The little mountain villages across the heated valley robed themselves in blue mist. Beneath the wall the road up the hill from the Porta Fredano cut the olive trees with its snaky coils. The silence was like the emptiness of worlds.

Suddenly she rose, impulsively striking out for an escape. Erard would come in a few days, hours, minutes. He might be in Florence now. She must do something before she met him, find some resolution. Unconsciously she began to follow the road, hastening along its curves in an impetuous desire to flee. Gradually she became conscious that she was seeking for Jennings. She might find him below in the city, and he *must* save her,— he would know how. So she ran on feverishly, dragging her weak limbs over the great paving-stones, which were heated like an oven. Some instinct led her to the Ponte Vecchio, where she happened on Jennings, sauntering idly with the throng that had come out to breathe in the evening air. Then she had nothing to say, but stood panting, her white face flushing to the dark hair.

"What has happened?" he asked her gently, and taking her arm he led her out of the sharp bustle on the bridge into a side street and then to the entrance of the Boboli gardens. The great cypresses threw an inviting shade,

towards which they walked. Jennings waited for her explanation.

"It has come, at last," she stammered awkwardly. "I am free now."

Jennings did not seem to understand her full meaning.

"But you have been 'free' for nearly a year. Have you at last found peace in that potent word?"

"No," she replied impatiently. "I did not mean that. Walter brought me the news that — since the fifteenth — I have not been Mrs. Wilbur. I am legally free — to make a mess of it."

"Well?" He implied that this news was not unexpected, or of sufficient importance to explain her tremor.

"It is dreadful," she murmured incoherently. "What am I to do?"

"It hasn't succeeded, has it?" His blunt words were spoken softly. "There isn't any real difference between these people, Erard's Art Endeavour Circle and Protestants in general, and the good people of Chicago. They aren't a great deal more interesting, Salters and Vivian and the southern poet and the Jew critic and the chorus of aspirants, than the Chicago lot with their simpler ambitions and manners and cruder expression. On the whole they aren't so good; they are nearer dead: the others have a race to run, and these have only their graves to dig. And if I were going merely to rot," his voice trembled, "I should rather rot with the Philistines and be a good human animal than —"

"Well, there are others," she protested. "You mention only the small fry, like me."

Jennings looked at her abstractedly. He was answering his own heart rather than considering her.

"They are all much alike, these sighers after art and beauty. A poor lot, take them as a whole, who decide to eat honey all their lives! I have seen more of them than anything else in Europe, — dilettantes, connoisseurs, little artists, lazy scholars. Chiefly Americans, who, finding America too incomplete, come here and accomplish nothing. In every centre in Europe you can find two or three of them in the various stages of decay. The environment they run after atrophies their faculties; the very habits of life which are best for these people hurt *them;* they sink into laziness. Erard is the leader of the tribe, — the grand high-priest of the mysteries of the higher senses!"

He ended his declamation with a laugh. His cold contempt shut her heart and drove her back to defence.

"But he has made it worth while; you are not fair to him. He has lived in the only way *he* could and reach his ends. And he has done something; he knows."

"Perhaps," Jennings agreed dubiously, thinking his own thoughts aloud with brutal disregard for her inferences. "What a bloodless, toady existence, sucking in the joys of his paradise! And for what? A few books to be replaced by a new set in another generation, a few epigrams, and a little quivering of his 'sensorium.' Better a day in an Indiana town, than a year of *that!*"

Mrs. Wilbur turned her face away. Even he was so pitiless! She had come to him in her distress for comfort, and instead of soothing her, of leading her out of

her tangle, he heaped up this stern indictment against all her past ideals.

"You didn't know Peter Erard." He began to tell that story again. "You see, there was the mother. She died, saving her pennies to give Simeon a new suit when he was tutoring Mr. Anthon's daughter. Then there were the father and Peter. The father was too old to work, and Peter kept him comfortable and I believe sent Erard money, first by a job in Jersey City, then by one in Chicago. Over a year ago Peter met with an accident and lost his job — Miss Parker knows these facts — and, finally a little while ago, died. When he was ill, Erard, Simeon, that is to say, was in Chicago, giving lectures and visiting. Peter saw him once. And the old man might die in the poor-house now, if it weren't for Miss Parker."

Mrs. Wilbur listened with compressed lips. She had been fighting off this disagreeable tale for a long time.

"That Peter Erard — *he* was a man!" Jennings continued, his face lighting up. "*He* had it in him to do something, and he knew it, and he never talked slush. He took his place in the ranks, like a man. And now he is dumb, as he was in life!"

"Perhaps the other one showed his genius by defying all these claims and making his way in spite of them," Mrs. Wilbur stammered, remembering the Napoleonic glory of Simeon's first confessions to her. Jennings looked at her pityingly.

"Do you think so? now that you know the story in all its sordid detail? And can you still think that the

result is worth while? Is it any better than the grab, and the coarse perception about traction stocks, and the rest of the unpleasant side of Chicago which annoys our nostrils? Merely because you work in pictures or books, and not in pork and dry-goods. Ah, Peter was the man, and he was a private!"

"You aren't fair to Simeon — to me," she retorted hotly. "You make nothing of that hunger for something beautiful, that love — I had it, you can believe me. Some people have it and die unless —"

"Did you get what you wanted?" Jennings exclaimed, pacing back and forth across the strip of gravel.

"No!" she exclaimed in something like a sob. "The joy faded so fast! And the more I grow to know, the less I am filled with the old rapture. I have striven so to possess joy, and gone so low in my own sight. It is bitter, bitter —"

"Europe tempts us Americans," her companion interrupted excusingly. "It holds so many treasures, and the life of the spirit is organized here. I came near giving in, once, those days in Oxford where everything seemed spread for enjoyment. I rather longed to help myself to dainties until I was full. But —"

"But what?"

"It's against nature, a sin against nature. Life is not fulfilled, we are not quieted, in that way. To accept the world as it comes to our hands, to shape it painfully without regard for self, — that brings the soul to peace."

He had made his decision, and evidently he had found some solace. She could not take the same road easily;

she had gone the other way. She looked up into his face longingly, pleadingly, as if she were wildly hoping that he would take her with him, that he would not leave her in her wanderings.

"I am going back to the niggers," Jennings continued after a pause in a lighter tone. "Won't that please Mrs. Stevans! I think my friends expected me to become another kind of Erard." He laughed good-humouredly. "And likely enough they are right, to thrash about for the sweets and what you call freedom. But it seems to me ridiculous and undignified."

With these careless words he seemed to close the topic which had agitated her so profoundly. She felt that she ought to have enough pride and self-reliance to accept her difficulties silently, but a certain feminine dependence on leadership — strange to herself — left her feeble before this crisis. She appealed to him audaciously, clinging to his strength. "And I — what shall I do?"

"Is it all over — the joy and the venture?"

"I seem to have died, instead of gaining freedom."

"That word! How it deceives us! You have chased a shadow."

"You mean?"

"There is no freedom and every one is free. It is all a matter of feeling. And that feeling you cannot command."

"Like love." She glanced up at him, her face thrilling with a strange idea.

"Yes, like love," he repeated in a low voice. "It takes us unawares when we have given up the search."

"Then I have never loved." Her mind revolved in a new orbit. "When I married I was seeking, seeking. When I studied, when I tried to act, I was always seeking. And the more I have struggled the farther I have gone—away, astray. Even the first false light that shone those September days when the pictures spoke, went, and I am left alone with my little knowledge, and nothing else, nothing. It is like love," she repeated at last.

"Yes. It is a state of feeling, of the spirit, not a condition of person."

"I was as free in Chicago as I am here?"

He nodded.

"And my money has not bought it, nor my body won it."

"Nor your mind," Jennings added softly. "Nor your will. Not any of these things."

"It could come over there in the prairie-town."

"Or with the niggers," suggested Jennings with a slight smile.

The new conception gained hold on her, while she sat staring out above the palaces of the city into the evening gloom. At last she uttered in a low moan,—"After all, to be bound, bound with no one to cut the cords; to be bound in spirit and flesh—no escape possible. It is ghastly!"

"You said once that you wished to burn, to feel. You remember that last night at Lake Forest?"

"And you replied—'to dust and ashes,'" she added fiercely. "Is that all for *me*?"

She rose from the bench with a sweep, a touch of defiance that brought back her old impressive self. She seemed to say, "You mock me. Impossible that I, who am beautiful and keen in mind, that I who have striven, am to become mere ashes." And the movement which challenged him, saying, "I am a woman," said also, "I can love. Teach me, you new master, and you will find me humble. Take me, and make me over to fit *your* freedom." But he made no sign of acceptance, merely looked back at her dark head with its flaming eyes, admiringly, with homage and with pity, — but with nothing more. He knew her to the bottom of her heart and he was compassionate, but he would not save her, could not save her.

"So you are going to take the commonplace," she said at last, irritably, closing her eyes and turning her face away.

"Yes, the very commonplace."

"And nothing tempts you?" She shot a glance which searched him, knocking to find a hollow sound in his protestations.

"No."

She walked away to the farthest shade of the cypresses, thinking with a pang: "He will marry Molly. I am — dust and ashes." Then she was haughty with herself for having craved relief through him. It was foolish for her to believe that she might yet be taught to accept and to feel again as children feel. What could *he* do for her? What had she to do with love? She had never known the word until to-night.

In an instant she was at his side again. "You think me an impossible creature to be shunned?"

"No. I was not thinking of *you* in particular," he answered gravely. And she felt doubly ashamed, as they descended the terraces of the garden, silently, mournfully.

CHAPTER IX

THAT evening Molly remarked to her friend abruptly, "Walter thinks he wishes to marry me."

"Well?" Mrs. Wilbur asked with quick curiosity.

"I'll tell you all about it. He feels badly now, but, if it doesn't get out he will be all right in a few weeks. He asked me to do it — marry him — at least for your sake. But I told him I couldn't do it, even for you."

"He means so very well, Molly!" Mrs. Wilbur exclaimed with some compassion.

"Yes, too well by me! He's been trying not to do this thing ever since I have known you. He almost slipped twice, no, three times. This afternoon he didn't want to do it one bit, and even at the end he made me feel that it was a condescension on his part."

"Oh, Molly!"

"He began by thanking me profusely for all I had done for you. Told me the family were very appreciative of my efforts to save you from yourself, and to preserve the decencies of social life."

Mrs. Wilbur winced.

"He said a great crisis was coming in your life now, and we two, Mr. Anthon and I, could help you so much in case — "

"The little hypocrite! Was that all?"

"Yes, about you then. I think the next event was that he tried to kiss me before he had really said anything — well, definite. He first took my hand, then insinuated his arm about my waist — we were in a dark corner under a wall —"

"Molly!"

"Well, we know him *so* well! and I wanted to see what it is like to have love made in that way. I felt like, — as if I were a maid, a servant. It was quite horrid! It might have been Pina. When he reached a certain point, just beyond the proper pressure for a waltz — I, I laughed."

She laughed again at the memory.

"Then I lectured him soundly. I began 'way back with the beginning, — his running around after people, his toadying, his literary ambitions, his self-importance. I talked to him about his treatment of you in Paris; he merely wanted to get rid of you decently. After that we discussed love. I used some of Erard's psychology. He was after sensations merely, I told him — wanted to know how it would feel to kiss me. He would be awfully lugubrious afterwards, if I had snapped him up, and he had come to his senses to-morrow to find himself engaged to a poor girl twenty-five years old with no social pulls. I described to him how such a man 'falls in love,' and how he makes a grumbling, fault-finding husband. Oh! I taught him a lot!"

She laughed again. Mrs. Wilbur wished to laugh also, but restrained herself.

"I ended by giving him some good advice about him-

self. In the first place he must get some kind of principles, just for convenience. Now he doesn't care about anything but the looks of things. And do you know what he said — he was very angry by this time! 'Why, Miss Parker, you have a singular misconception of me. How could I have all the friends who surround me and how could I make so many influential connections in London, if I were the sort of man you describe?' Actually, he said that. Your brother, Adela, is quite hopeless."

"Was that all?"

"Yes, he was very, very angry, so mad he forgot to be hurt. It was the kindest way to send him off. He will go back to London to-morrow, pretty well cured of an infatuation, which, he assured me, had extended over five years."

Mrs. Wilbur laughed this time without scruple. But after a time she said earnestly, "You might have done so much for him, Molly!"

Molly looked at her, with a trace of contempt in her smiling mouth. "Do you think that's the right place for missionary endeavour, Adela?" An instant later she nestled up to her friend. "Forgive me, dear. I am horrid and heartless."

The two shed a few tears. "We women never escape our affections," Mrs. Wilbur remarked ruefully, thinking of the afternoon. "Men get along so much more easily."

"I don't want to escape!" Molly replied promptly, and then blushed.

Walter Anthon departed the next morning at an early hour, leaving behind him, in a fluent, spiteful little note,

his last words to his sister. He now made the final washing of his hands in her case, and having pointed out the path of true wisdom and decency, he left her to profit by the lesson. Mrs. Wilbur tossed Molly the note. "See what a rupture you have made, Molly, between brother and sister!"

"The little beast! He wants you to marry Erard! I didn't think he was as bad as that, or I should have added a fifthly to my sermon."

"Perhaps he is right," Mrs. Wilbur asserted drearily.

She wondered where Erard was these days. He had not written her from Rome, thus attempting to discipline her for her revolt by neglect. She did not know that he had returned to Florence, that he was quietly biding his time, nor that Walter Anthon had seen him before he had come to her on his last diplomatic errand. Indeed, that errand had been but a part of Walter's scheme, the plan of which had already been worked out in the rooms on the Piazza San Spirito. The two men had come to an understanding, during an hour of vague fencing: young Anthon was to strike first, and then after a decent interval Erard was to conclude the matter.

In the meantime letters from the outside world penetrated Mrs. Wilbur's silence, like little voices talking over her divorce. Strangely, the most moving one was from Mrs. Anthon. "That loud Mrs. Stevans has the house your father's money helped to build. They are to be married in London, the papers say, and when they get back in the fall they expect to do the house all over and put in all the pictures and rubbish she's collected.

Her photograph was in the *Sunday Thunderer* last week —as big and coarse looking as ever. . . . I feel old now, Ada, and it seems as though, after all I have done for my children, I weren't wanted in the world. Your brother John's wife doesn't like me, and now you are gone, there's no place to go to except a hotel, and that doesn't seem quite respectable. But it won't be for long. . . ."

As she read this letter, something like remorse came over Mrs. Wilbur for her harsh and unsympathetic treatment of her mother. Since the talk in the Boboli gardens with Jennings several illuminating ideas had altered her conception of life. It could not be denied that this mother was silly and vulgar. But to be foolish, to be common, was not the most hideous crime for pitiable human beings to commit, she had begun to realize. And what had she gained by her struggle for escape? She was drifting now, uncertainly. Drifting, her life must be, if she continued her effort; drifting on into a *declassé milieu,* where she would amuse herself with the gossip and fritter of art, where her sole object would be to enjoy and pass away the years. She had learned well what that kind of European life was like.

Thus a week, two weeks passed. Jennings was to leave for America in another fortnight. Erard was yet to be heard from, and she was sure that the day was not far off when he would show his hand. At times the idea of the tie that bound her to him exhaled a strange kind of corrupt fascination. How he had dominated her! What was there inside of him? She felt a reckless

curiosity to explore the dark, private places of his soul, to touch his clammy self more closely, and to know the worst.

At last Erard appeared late one evening. Molly and Jennings had gone out in search of a cool breeze. As Mrs. Wilbur lay in the moonlight on the terrace, she heard a soft step on the road below the wall. It crept on around the corner, and the sound disappeared. She knew it was Erard. Soon she heard his quiet, positive, yet catlike tread on the terrace. She could feel his movement behind her; he was gaining, coming closer at last, and she lay passive, wondering what the outcome would be.

"You are quite alone?" Erard greeted her questioningly.

"Yes," she murmured, without betraying either interest or surprise in his presence. She took it for granted that he had just returned from Rome.

"Such a heavenly night!" Erard dropped his glasses and leaned against the parapet as if he had plenty of time for contemplation. He had accepted the idea of marriage with its possible inconveniences, yet he did not propose to be untactful, to place himself in the open by asking her to become Mrs. Erard. He would first bid her love him, as though he knew of no possible union for them. That was a finer stroke, and if Anthon had had sense enough not to chatter about their talk, all would go as he planned.

She was a fit possession to have, he reflected, as he watched her white face. She was striving, unsatisfied,

keen-minded, and beautiful, with a reserve of feminine power, which even his insinuating wits couldn't penetrate. She was John Anthon's daughter, and had a hundred and fifty thousand from him, and a fool of a brother. She was Sebastian Anthon's niece, and had two hundred thousand from him. Sebastian Anthon was the kind old fool who had supplied him with money to live on, as you'd give a boy pocket money; and then had turned him off to starve because he didn't make enough of a sensation. She had been John Wilbur's wife, and had deserted that pompous *bourgeois* at his suggestion because the successful Wilbur was too much of a stupid. He, Simeon Erard, held her in his hand as his ripe spoil.

"It is one great peace here," he resumed. "I feel content, too. So much that I have striven for all these years since you first began your help to me has come about. I have been asked recently to contribute a series of articles to the new *International Review*. There is talk, I hear, of making me one of the sub-editors. That would necessitate our living in Paris part of each winter. The publishers have begun to print our book. I have the proofs of the first volume with me. We can run them over together this summer."

He paused, surprised that she seemed so languid. "Doesn't that interest you any more?" he asked suspiciously.

"Of course." Mrs. Wilbur roused herself. "I am glad to know that your efforts are meeting with their reward. You are getting some of the prizes in your game." A

sudden whim made her add meaningly, "Now you can afford to look outside; you can do something for your father. Peter, you know, is gone. He died without getting the prizes."

She could hear the gravel crunch under his feet as he turned swiftly from his idle stand by the parapet, but he answered tranquilly.

"What have they to do with the matter? Have I ever mentioned them to you? I will take care of them — him, in my own good time. You do not understand, Adela."

"Oh, no! you never mentioned them to me. It occurred to me that in this new life of success, you might have time and means — to take Peter's place."

He did not reply. Her remarks seemed to make little impression on him. Instead, he drew near her, deliberately, watching her steadfastly.

"What I wish is that this new life shall bring me *you*." He pronounced the words with slow emphasis. She remained numb, vaguely repeating his words to herself. He continued slowly: "We are made for each other." Wilbur had said *that*. "You have the strong mind, and you know what living means." Too well, alas! and he had taught her many a lesson. "We have lived this year as one person. You know my thoughts; I know yours."

He paused after every phrase. Then as he had planned, he attempted passion. It was the right place for passion, and this silent, white woman with her sombre face, who for once refused to meet him, moved him to a sort of self-conscious passion. He trembled

slightly, and coming a step nearer, he bent over her chair and looked into her face intently.

"You are mine, you are mine, my lady Adela!" He touched her arms deftly, attempting to arouse her. "Adela! We have lived for one another. My great woman!" He seemed to her nearer, yet nothing moved her. She even looked at him calmly. His passion was clammy. She must have more of it, however; it was like a triumph, a revenge over herself, to have him thus. "We shall make our world one long splendid day —"

His arms were about her now, and she felt the pressure of him person to person, and the kiss from his lips. Then she awoke; her breath came wildly. Suddenly she knew that he was aware that she was free to be his wife. Her brother had been in Rome. This was all prepared. It was the final play in the game to reduce her *first*, and make terms, *his* terms, later.

"No! no!" She pushed him back coldly.

"You are mine — you have said it with your eyes, once, twice, and now I take my own."

"Yes! I have been yours in despair, in reckless thought, but — but that has passed. It is impossible!"

He looked at her nonplussed. She felt compelled to explain. "You have broken me in, made yourself my master. You made me think content with the little commonplace of life was silly. You scoffed at all the pitiful efforts of the others. And I obeyed you — I broke their laws, thinking to find peace in beauty and enjoyment —"

"Well? What do you want?"

"Want!" she repeated contemptuously. "Everything! You lowered me step by step, making me follow you, work for you, testing me; and if you had been enough of a man to have had pity, to have loved, *then*. . . . But, what is the use of words — I don't love you, — understand. I feared you, but I don't love you. And I see you now quite clearly without glamour. I — I hate the kind of man you have made yourself. I *hate* you," she repeated deliberately as he stepped back.

"No, I am wrong, I despise you, as I would — I can go on working for you, admiring your clever wits, and helping you perhaps, — but I despise you so heartily that you will never feel it — " she stopped exhausted.

"Did I advise you to follow this way of life?" Erard asked, attempting to regain his usual imperturbability.

"Oh, no! You would do nothing so rash."

"Have I given you nothing?"

"Why, yes, yourself. And, I suppose, I should be content with that. You have got out of life what you wanted, including your poor triumph over me. But if you ever come to have the highest fame you dream of, that will make no difference to me. You have trodden out every human feeling in your body. You have succeeded, but your success is rotten, rotten."

Her voice sounded harshly in the soft air. A gentle breeze stirred the trees overhead and shook out the perfumes of the flowers. She struggled again with her incoherence.

"It has taken me a good while to understand. It has taken a thousand little things to teach me about you.

But I have learned! Now let me tell you that your analysis is not always right. It would have been better *not* to wait — until the legal side had been straightened out, and we could marry and my fortune could be — attached. Perhaps, perhaps, —" She rose and followed him to the parapet. "Once perhaps you could have had me, to suck out my life and throw me away. Perhaps I would have followed you, — slave I already was, — your mistress and your adorer. But you — waited — until it was quite regular. And, meanwhile, you have made me see!"

"I don't follow your ravings closely, but I gather that if I had let you —"

"Take care! Mind your manners!" she exclaimed more calmly, with a touch of her old haughtiness. "You can't understand, and I shall not try to explain. It is a question of casuistry in a woman's heart that isn't in your field."

"And can you explain where I have offended you?"

"Oh! I am of no importance, and it would take me a long time to make you see. But I will tell you a few things. You have pushed your way, you have taken what you want from the world, lived off it! You have abandoned your own people, you have sneered at your own land. And, what is worse than all, you have failed — to add one beautiful thing to this sore old world! You cannot, you cannot! I did not know why — now I do. There is no blood in your body, Mr. Simeon Erard, — no human, sinning, rich blood. Ah! you know too much, and your knowledge is — worthless."

Erard made no attempt to stem this impetuous passion. Women were powder mines, or brutes, if they had any spirit in them. This one had served him a panther's trick.

"You have taught me to climb the same desolate hill where you have perched yourself. I have my freedom — I am alone now — but it would be better for me to be dead," she concluded passionately.

"Do you regret that your husband has made it quite impossible for you to play the prodigal wife?"

Mrs. Wilbur gave him the look that is a blow.

"You are so low that we need not discuss my divorce. Indeed, we need not alter our way of life, so long as it interests me. When you cease to amuse my wits, I shall give you notice. Until then I shall be glad to continue my assistance. And I think it will be easier for both of us, now that we understand each other."

"It might be better for your reputation, since you are divorced, to —"

"Thank you! You are tender of my reputation rather late. Remember that you have taught me to live above such philistine considerations. And I have explained sufficiently why I do not care to be Mrs. Simeon Erard."

"We can hardly continue our former relationship under the circumstances."

Mrs. Wilbur laughed lightly. "Don't be so foolish as to try the heroic. Be the very wise man you have made me believe you are, and continue as if nothing had happened but a temporary aberration from reason on your part. Or, rather, a miscalculation that we can forget

soon. And I may take myself away from your fold some day."

Erard folded his arms and looked at her sneeringly.

"You have never shown me quite so much of this theatrical side."

"No? We women have it about us somewhere, and certain topics are likely to call it out. There is convention — you and I agree *that* is senseless and boring. There is intelligence — you and I value that quite highly enough. And there is life and honour and love: on such matters you are not fitted to talk, and I grow theatrical. If you will ring that bell in the arbour, Pina will bring you some wine and cigarettes. There are the voices of Mr. Jennings and Molly. We have had just time enough for our little understanding, Mr. Simeon Erard."

She nodded to him pleasantly, and walked into the villa with a light step.

CHAPTER X

THE night was so still and hot that no one proposed to try for sleep in close chambers. They sat in the garden watching the little villages go out into darkness, snuffed out like candles over the plain and hills. Only Fiesole, solitary on its lonely pinnacle, sent one stream of steady light across the valley. The gloomy palaces below them were utterly quiet, as if empty and desolate. The stars in the heavens shone distantly in the immense blackness. At last the men strolled down to the gate, smoking and talking.

"I am so very, very happy!" Molly Parker whispered, crouching down by her friend's chair.

"I was thinking that I am so very sad," Mrs. Wilbur replied dreamily. "But I was wrong. I have sloughed off a delusion, and I am alive again. I have broken with myself. But what has happened to Molly? Is she at last in love?"

For an answer the younger woman put her arms about Mrs. Wilbur and rested her head upon her shoulder.

"So it is all right, Molly, at last!"

"Yes, I knew it must be, though I was afraid and sad when I came away from Chicago."

"And you are sure?" Mrs. Wilbur asked, as if doubtful whether human hearts were to be trusted.

"There is nothing to tell you, nothing. But you are *so sure!* A word, a look, and then, O Adela! there is such peace!"

Mrs. Wilbur stroked her face silently. The heart of a child had lived on into maturity in this woman, at least.

"And you don't mind the poverty and the small future?"

"Adela!"

"And you think it will always be enough for him to put his arm there where mine is?"

"I don't think."

"Yes, that is better, dear. You have all that I have striven for. It has come to you unconsciously and naturally, like sleep when you are tired, or food when you are hungry."

"Poor Adela!"

"Oh, no. I am content. I have found out, after all my blundering, what kind of a world it is. A big place! One must not shiver in it. The really foolish people are those who struggle, like me, for what is only an idea."

They continued to hold one another silently. At last Molly Parker spoke mischievously. "Perhaps there won't be niggers always!"

Mrs. Wilbur laughed. "You will be anxious to leave me, to go back to America soon?"

"Yes, but no, not leave you—"

"*Yes*," Mrs. Wilbur repeated with a sad smile. "Perhaps I shall go with you, after all. They have my blood, the self-same inheritance with me. In them and

with them must I make my life, if it is to be anything."

Molly kissed her again tearfully.

"There are some whom I have made to suffer," Mrs. Wilbur mused, "and especially my mother. I must learn how to live."

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